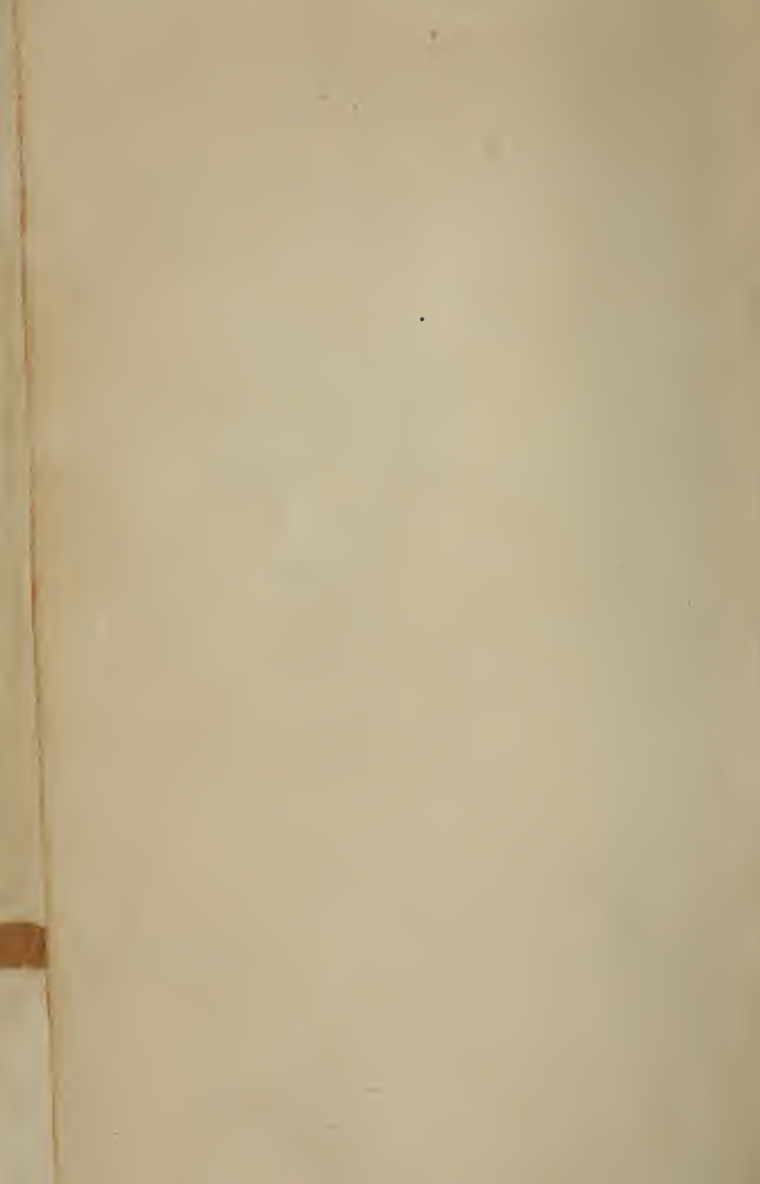






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JANET'S CHOICE.

BY

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“MAGGIE'S SECRET.”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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JANET'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

“Intelligence and courtesy not always are combined,
Often in a wooden house a golden room we find.”

LONGFELLOW.

MRS. BECKET was an early bird. It required no alarums, no sound of wheels, no throwing of gravel to her windows, to awaken her; when others were sleeping peacefully and soundly she was up and stirring, and by the time the shop-boys were sleepily taking down the shutters, and the maids had begun the operation of painfully elaborating the

doorsteps with hearth-stones, and the milk-men were going their rounds, the lively lady had already accomplished a fair amount of work.

On the day fixed for her interview with Mr. Purway, she was returning from a walk in the Park which she generally took before breakfast, when she caught sight of two figures on the opposite side of the street which she thought she recognised.

Crossing directly, regardless of mud and dirt, she found that she was right in her conjecture, and that Grace Morton and Lady Violet Ogilvie were just before her. Tapping Grace smartly on the shoulder with the handle of her umbrella, she exclaimed.

“My dear children, to think of your being out of doors at this time of day! Where have you been?”

"We might ask you the same question, Mrs. Becket," said Grace.

"You certainly must," said Mrs. Becket, "but you would not get the same answer. I suspect you have been to Church, like good, devout children, whilst I, who am a shocking old heathen, have only been taking a constitutional in the Park, according to my usual habit."

"Do you always go out so early, Mrs. Becket?" said Lady Violet shyly, for she always felt rather alarmed at the old lady's sharp glances.

"Yes, I generally air myself before the world gets aired. I like to be beforehand with my work," said Mrs. Becket.

"Now that we have met you, Mrs. Becket," said Grace, "we must carry you off to breakfast with us, and then you will be at our house without fail by the time the detective makes his appearance."

Mrs. Becket, being a sociable animal, did not require much pressing, and the three ladies arrived at Lady Morton's house before either the mother or the son had come down stairs.

Lady Violet went to her room to take off her bonnet, but Grace proceeded at once to her usual task of tea-making.

"How you have improved that child," said Mrs. Becket as the door closed, "she is not the same person that she was when those dreadful Anstruthers brought her to Lashiels."

"She is very charming," said Grace, "she is so lady-like, and so entirely devoid of affectation; it is a great pleasure to me to have her here."

"She is very like her mother," said Mrs. Becket. "What a sweet woman that was!"

"So mamma says," said Grace, "I never knew her myself."

“My dear, she was an angel, but my opinion is that this girl has far more talent—at least her face seems to denote it,” said Mrs. Becket.

“She is really very clever, Mrs. Becket, and I am so pleased that you have discovered it,” said Grace. “It is a real pleasure to me to have her to deal with, her remarks are so apposite; and then she has such a wonderful memory. I never knew any girl of her age who could repeat such an amount of poetry as she can.”

“Bless me!” said Mrs. Becket, “to think of that now, and I never could remember a rhyme to save my life. I do not suppose there is anyone so eminently prosaic as I am in the world.”

Mrs. Becket had a way, which amused Grace very much, of always bringing back the conversation to herself, no

matter from what distant topic it might have started.

Archie came into the room at that moment followed by his mother, and the breakfast proceeded with many jokes and much good-humour.

"I'd defy anyone to be dull and grumpy when you are of the party," said Archie to Mrs. Becket at last.

"That is because you are so good-tempered and belong to such an amiable family," said Mrs. Becket, mercifully forbearing to make the observation that she *had* seen the young laird himself uncommonly dull and grumpy.

Violet looked up quickly and caught a twinkle in the old lady's bright eye which she felt sure meant mischief. She however attributed it to another cause.

"An amiable family," Mrs. Becket had

called them, but surely she was ironical, as she could not include Petronel in that phrase.

Petronel, with her set proud face, and such scorn looking out of her handsome eyes, with her eyebrows a little raised and her lips curled—Violet could see her with her mind's eye so vividly at that moment. No one could have used the word amiable in reference to her.

Grace also saw the expression in Mrs. Becket's eye, but she attributed it to the right cause, and knew well that the inquisitive weaver of romances had her wits sharpened to read the ins and outs of the story of Archie's life. She hastened with her usual tact to change the subject.

Precisely as the clock struck ten Mr. Purway was announced, and he was followed

in less than a minute by Major Armstrong.

“The plot thickens,” said Mrs. Becket to the latter, “really this is very exciting. I feel like Guy Fawkes or one of the conspirators of the Rye House Plot.”

Mr. Purway was a tall, thin man, with sandy hair cut very short and a freckled complexion.

His manner to his employed was deferential, not to say obsequious, but in spite of his assumed openness there was a sort of suspicious scrutiny in his eye, as if everyone in turn was the object of his furtive observation.

“He is a deep one!” whispered Mrs. Becket to Major Armstrong.

Some are old at heart at thirty, some are young at eighty. Mrs. Becket's heart was an evergreen; whatever interested her at all, moved and excited her, now that she

had passed the meridian of life, as much as it would have done in the days of her youth.

But with Mr. Purway, the detective, it was not so. It was impossible to form any guess as to his age. He might have been thirty, or he might have been fifty. His was a face which told no tales, and yet it was one which irresistibly suggested the idea of having a tale to conceal.

Archie began the conversation by cross-questioning him about the lost jewels.

"Have you any clue to the thief or thieves yet?" said he.

"I fancy so, Sir," replied Purway, "I have been working incessantly on the job, and I have come here to-day with great hopes that I have good news for you."

"Oh! I am so glad," said Lady Morton, "I am so glad, Mr. Purway, how very clever of you to find them! My daughter will be so pleased."

"I am afraid your ladyship's hopes are leading you to be too sanguine," said Mr. Purway, with a courtly bow. "I cannot lay claim to the honour of having discovered the missing jewels as yet, though I have great hopes that they may yet be found, but I merely state that I hope I have put my hand upon a clue."

"Sit down and tell us all about it, Mr. Purway," said Mrs. Becket ("bless the man does he think he is in church?") added she aside to Lady Violet, as Mr. Purway looked gravely for a moment into his hat before complying with her request.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, I shall

be most happy to tell you what I know about the matter, if I have your permission to speak." Here he again looked into his hat, and this time Violet's quick eyes discovered that it was method, not devotion, which caused him to do so, for pinned to the inside lining of that article of wearing-apparel was a tiny slip of paper, on which were written certain cabalistic signs and numbers, evidently notes to assist him in preserving the order of his details in the forthcoming recital.

"You must know, my lady," said Mr. Purway, (addressing Lady Morton, and studiously turning his back on Mrs. Becket) "that I am in a small and humble way something of an artist. I do not speak boastingly of my skill, which is but small, but I have a certain taste and knowledge of art, which has from time

to time led to my being consulted by gentlemen on the subject of the merits of pictures they are thinking of purchasing."

Here he looked at Lady Morton, as if he expected her to make some comment before this interesting communication.

Lady Morton bowed politely, but looked rather bewildered, as she could not quite see what Mr. Purway's artistic tastes had to do with the discovery of the missing jewels. Nothing daunted by her puzzled air, Mr. Purway resumed his discourse, still looking at Lady Morton, and still studiously avoiding looking at Mrs. Becket.

"Your ladyship may perhaps be aware," he said, "that there are many valuable pictures to be found by a connoisseur, in what are called curiosity shops, and

that these curiosity shops themselves are numerous, and of various degrees of respectability. In fact, many of them are neither more nor less than pawn-brokers, though their more pretentious title sounds better."

He again paused, and this time Lady Morton gave her little bow with more alacrity, as she was beginning to see a faint glimmer of light at the end of his long sentences.

"Your ladyship," he continued, "will forgive me again alluding to my love of art, as in this particular instance it has been of use to me. Happening to meet a gentleman who is a great collector, in the streets, as I was prosecuting my researches into the case in hand, he informed me that he had just seen a nice bit of colour in a small picture-shop in the City, and he was almost certain it

was a valuable thing. Would I mind getting into a cab with him and going at once to look at it, and to pronounce my opinion upon it? At first I was inclined to refuse, feeling that my time was your ladyship's, and that I was not justified in employing it on other people's affairs; but when my friend mentioned the name of the shop in which he had seen what he fancied to be a treasure, I hesitated no longer, feeling that it was just the sort of place in which I might gain intelligence which might be of use to you in this matter."

"Delightful!" burst in Mrs. Becket. "Oh, you dear delightful man! do go on and tell us what came next."

Her excitement seemed to amaze the calm and deliberate Mr. Purway; but he was too polite to express his astonishment at her vehemence, he merely in-

clined his head gravely, and went on with his history with a Northern deliberateness of manner and slowness of utterance that were very trying to an impatient audience.

“Accordingly, my lady,” he continued, “I stepped into the cab with my friend, and drove to the house indicated. On entering it I found my suspicions verified, as it was easy for an experienced eye to see that the objects of art, the china, the pictures, and the jewelry on sale had once belonged to people in a very different position of society from that of the shop-keeper, and had probably come into his hands under circumstances of family distress and ruin which it would be interesting, but irrelevant, to trace. My friend at once made his way to the picture he had spoken of, I followed him; still however, in accordance with my

usual habit, and in the interest of my profession, keeping my eyes open to what was passing around.

“The picture, a Dutch interior, was in my opinion an undoubted Teniers, and having whispered to my friend that he was right in his idea, and that he had really lighted upon a gem, I cast a glance at the jewel-cases which were under a glass counter a little beyond.

“Family jewels they were undoubtedly, many of them; but whether they had been stolen, or whether the owners had found themselves obliged to part with them, I could not say. While I was looking at them from a distance, I observed an elderly woman, with her face covered with a thick lace veil, draw from her bag a parcel carefully tied up in silver paper. She undid the strings and showed the shopman its

contents. They consisted of a cross of gold, set with dark blue stones, and two bracelets, one with a diamond star on a carbuncle, and the other a plain band of massive gold, with a central circle surrounded by pearls, and of sufficient depth to contain a portrait.

“Having the list which your ladyship confided to me of the missing property, pinned for safety and for convenience in the lining of my hat, I was able, even at the distance at which I stood, to feel sure that we were now on a right track.

“Seemingly absorbed in the contemplation of the curious carving of an old mirror, I so placed myself that I could observe the whole transaction reflected in the glass.”

Here Mrs. Becket interrupted the narrative by the vigorous clapping of

her hands, while Mr. Purway, like an actor accustomed to plaudits, merely inclined his head and proceeded.

“I distinctly saw the woman offer the jewels to the shop-keeper, who turned them over in his hand, felt their weight and seemed to appraise their value. There appeared to be some discussion between them as to the price demanded for them, and I caught the words of the man as he handed them back to her.

“‘I do not know,’ he said, ‘that I can take them at all, but if I do I must test the stones first. I am busy to-day, but if you will wait till these customers are served, I will see what can be done.’

“At that moment I turned quietly round and called the man to my side, asking him some questions about the antiquity of the wood carving. The

woman replaced the jewels in her bag and seated herself to wait his leisure.

“Contriving to allure him into the backshop on some pretence, I told him who I was, and what I had reason to suspect concerning the jewels of which I had just caught sight.

“The man was evidently honest as far as his lights went, but in the course of his business he was obliged, from self-interest, to wink at many things which would not bear the full light of day. He was not however, knowingly, a receiver of stolen goods, and the fear that I should imagine him to be such, and report him to the police, made him as ductile as wax in my hands.”

Here Mr. Purway moved his long thin fingers with an action in imitation of a sculptor modelling clay.

“But who is the woman?” said Lady Morton. “I had always imagined that the thief was a man.”

“It does not follow, my lady,” said Mr. Purway, with a superior look and smile, “that the woman ever set foot in this house; but it is very possible that she has either a son or a husband implicated in the matter.”

“True,” said Lady Morton meekly. “I am sorry I interrupted you, pray go on, Mr. Purway.”

“Your ladyship will remember,” began the detective, with a look intended to imply that the interruption was not to be repeated, “that I had remarked that the man was as ductile as wax in my hands. I accordingly had no difficulty in moulding him to my will. ‘Haggle with the woman,’ I said, ‘show her that you want the jewels, and that you would rather buy

them out and out than lend money on them, then pretend that you want to consult your partner on the matter, and request her to come again at the same time to-morrow, throwing out a hint that if she has any more ornaments you would be glad to see them. I will be here at the appointed hour, say half-past twelve, and will bring with me some one who can and will identify them.'

"He promised compliance, and not wishing to excite the notice of the woman, I took my friend's arm, and sauntered leisurely out of the shop. Merely saying as I passed the woman, 'You will remember about the carved frame, Mr. Jones,' to which he replied (a little too hurriedly I thought, judging by a professional standard), 'Certainly, Sir, I will see about it at once.' I then

left the shop, and sauntered up and down the pavement in front, casting my eye inwards each time I passed the door, and having the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Jones apparently acting his part well, and the woman at last putting back the parcel into her bag and rising to take leave. He opened the shop-door for her, and I heard him say, ‘If you are here to-morrow at half-past twelve, I will see what we can do for you, madam.’ ”

“Half-past twelve, and it is eleven now,” cried Mrs. Becket; “good gracious, Archie, you have no time to spare, do start at once!”

Mr. Purway pulled out his watch, and said in a grave, professional manner, strangely at variance with the old lady’s excited gestures,

“It wants a quarter to eleven, Sir

Archibald, and if we leave this house at a quarter past, we shall be in plenty of time, allowing for delays in the streets; there is nothing so unprofessional as being before one's time at an appointment."

"All right, Purway," said Sir Archibald, "I will go and write a note, and will be with you in half an hour; in the meantime, as you are fond of art, my sister will, I have no doubt, show you some of her portfolios."

"It would be too much pleasure," said Mr. Purway, with a courtly bow to Grace, who left the room to fetch her sketches.

"Too bad, Archie!" she said laughingly, as her brother followed her into the passage, "it is too bad to make me exhibit my poor drawings to a professional judge of art."

"Never fear, Brownie," said Archie, "your pictures are every bit as well

worth notice as his 'undoubted Teniers,' I'll take a small bet. Don't you go and be too humble with him, or he will say you are as 'ductile as wax.' "

Grace laughed merrily. "That is more than Mrs. Becket would be in his hands," she said. "How excited the old lady is, I must make haste back and keep the peace, or there will be an explosion."

CHAPTER II.

“Stay a little and news will find you.”

GEORGE HERBERT.

GRACE spoke lightly, but for one moment there was something like a twinge at her heart-strings, when Archie had suggested her beguiling the spare half-hour of the detective with an exhibition of her drawings. Archie so strong and brave, so handsome and so fearless, much as he loved and trusted his little invalid sister, could not enter into some of her deeper thoughts.

Grace was so cheery, so patient, and ap-

parently so contented with her monotonous life, that her brother little guessed what she went through at times.

He knew not how often her spirit would beat its wings against the bars of its cage; how strong was her sense of the tedium of her imprisonment.

He could not even guess at the yearning which that pale, fragile creature felt for power and strength to enjoy the activity of life.

And then her drawing was a part of herself, a way she had of expressing her inner thoughts on paper in a language of colour, harmonious indeed to the eye of the beholder, but only understood by herself.

To have her treasures exhibited to a vulgar uneducated man like Mr. Purway, caused her real anguish for a moment; but conquering the feeling by her own

strong will and right principle, she never betrayed herself, and Archie only thought how good-natured she was as she went to do his bidding.

Mr. Purway was all bows and politeness when she returned laden with portfolios, which were almost too much for her strength to carry.

She had brought her best things, mainly from an impulse of self-discipline, and to punish herself for that momentary feeling of distaste, for Grace, gentle as she was, was a stern disciplinarian to herself.

"Do you know Scotland, Mr. Purway?" she asked, as she untied the strings of the portfolio. "Most of my sketches are Scotch."

"Indeed, Miss Morton," said Mr. Purway, "I have been familiar with Scotland from my youth; in fact, it is my native country."

He took up the drawings and looked at them one by one, with the air of a connoisseur. Holding them first close to his eyes, then a long way off, leaning back his head and ogling them sideways, in a manner that was highly ridiculous, and which Lady Violet Ogilvie could hardly observe without laughing.

Lady Morton had retired to write instantly to Petronel respecting the present hopeful state of affairs, and the chance of the lost treasures being soon recovered.

Mrs. Becket, Violet, Grace, and Major Armstrong were therefore left to entertain the detective until such time as the youthful lord and master of the house should be ready to start off with him to the City.

Mr. Purway appeared much delighted at the contents of Grace's portfolios, and

viewed her drawings with great seeming pleasure.

There were Italian views taken when Grace had once spent an Autumn and Winter in the sunny south. Little bits of lake scenery, with the water golden with the level sunrays, or lying peacefully beneath a broad full moon. Vineyards in which the busy peasants were gathering the purple fruit, and piling the long narrow baskets (or violin-cases, as Grace called them), which they carry on their backs, full to the brim with their luscious treasures.

Then there were olive groves with wavy lines of blue hills in the distance, and a group of *contadini*, or of brown burly friars, with their hoods drawn over their heads, to give life and action to the picture.

All these Mr. Purway saw and admired,

as specimens of real cultivated taste ; but when he came to the Scotch views his astonishment and delight knew no bounds.

There were sparkling way-side burns and heather mountains, solitary lochs and deep rocky glens. Grace thoroughly loved Scotland and therefore she painted Scotch scenes *con amore*.

The yew-tree walk at Lashiels was there, and so was Grace's sketch of the water-fall done on the memorable day on which Petronel's engagement had taken place.

The last drawing in the portfolio was the sketch of the glen of Lashiels, in which Grace had introduced her brother and Janet on the bridge.

Seeing this, Mr. Purway gave a visible start, though he recovered himself immediately owing to his usual habits of trained self-command.

Major Armstrong happened to be looking at his face at the moment, and was struck by the expression of it,

That very morning's post had brought a letter from Donald Inverarity to his old master, complaining bitterly of the present state of affairs at Lashiels.

"There was no getting that old monster, Andrew Macpherson, to listen to reason," he wrote, "and the only chance he saw of clearing up the mystery was by working out the matter by himself, and seeking for a clue by the aid of which the whole affair might be elucidated."

Major Armstrong had left his lodgings that morning full of this letter, but the presence of the detective and his circumstantial story of the lost jewels had for a time put it out of his head. When, however, he noticed Mr. Purway's start

of surprise at the sight of the bridge of Lashiels, the thought flashed suddenly upon him that here was a tool ready to hand, and that he should be extremely foolish to refuse to avail himself of it.

Purway had told them openly that he was a Scotchman, and he had seemed in some way or other mysteriously affected at the sight of the drawing of the bridge of Lashiels. Was there any reason for his startled glance? or did it merely result from some passing emotion? Major Armstrong told himself that he was very foolish to think anything at all of so slight and trivial a circumstance, especially as, looking again at the detective, he could notice nothing but his ordinary wooden aspect, as if he wore a mask calculated to defy the scrutiny of inquisitive beings.

And yet there was a sort of hungry look in his eyes as he gazed upon the picture, and turned back to it again and again, which made Major Armstrong more and more convinced that Lashiels was in some way or other connected with the man's life.

The idea that it was so was, as Methodists would say, borne in upon his mind so strongly as to be almost a presentiment.

“You say you are a Scotchman, Mr. Purway,” he began, “do you happen to know anything of the neighbourhood of Lashiels?”

He spoke carelessly, as if merely for the sake of making conversation, and not at all as if he cared what the answer would be.

“I have always heard that Lashiels was a beautiful place, Sir,” said Mr.

Purway, "my old home was not very far from there, but I left my native country quite as a youth, so my recollections of the neighbourhood are rather confused."

"Yours is not a Scotch name, however," said Grace.

No, Miss Morton, it is not," replied the detective, with a smile of superior wisdom. "No, it is not a Scotch name, and in fact it is not my real name. We, in my profession, find it convenient to drop family names at times, as they have a tendency to sink one into a private character."

"I see," said Mrs. Becket; "being a professional, you leave your private character in the dim distance."

"Exactly so, madam," said Mr. Purway.

"Are you coming with us, Arm-

strong?" said Sir Archibald, as he entered the room ready for his start.

"Oh yes, certainly," said Major Armstrong, rising and putting his hand into his pocket for his gloves.

As he did so he felt Donald Inverarity's letter, which he had thrust hastily in on leaving his lodgings that morning.

At that moment, the thought forced itself again upon him most strongly, that Mr. Purway's aid might be called in with advantage in the unravelling of that tangled skein of mystery, which seemed to have wound itself so closely around the lives of Donald and of his true love, Janet Macpherson.

Perhaps in his strong imagination he had over-shot the mark; but he was somehow inwardly convinced that there was something hidden under the controlled demeanour of Mr. Purway, which,

like the turbid river, allowed nothing beneath to be seen.

Why that concealed something, even supposing that he was right and that it *did* exist, should have any connection with Donald, he could not say; but with one of those strong feelings of presentiments which sometimes take hold of one, he was sure that it had.

The most unreasonable and unreasoning idea is often the hardest to get rid of, and Major Armstrong became at last quite provoked with the pertinacity with which this notion haunted him.

Lady Morton now came into the room to hurry them off.

"Do make haste, Archie, you will really be late, and it is so very important, as I am sure Mr. Purway will say, to keep appointments punctually."

"Yes, we ought to be off," said Archie,

becoming suddenly aware that he was keeping everybody waiting, and therefore persuading himself that it was he himself who was being delayed. "Good-bye, mother; good-bye, Mrs. Becket. Come and dine with us to-night to hear the result of our sniffing expedition."

"I hope it will be more than sniffing that Mr. Purway has already done. I hope the scent will lie," said Mrs. Becket.

The three men started at once, and the ladies indulged themselves in a little wondering chat as to the probable result of their researches. Grace began to put away her portfolios, turning over her drawings lovingly as she re-arranged her treasures.

"Bless me! what a clever little puss it is!" said Mrs. Becket, darting a sharp glance at them, as Grace turned them

over—a glance which seemed too rapid to take anything in, but in which nothing passed unobserved.

“Yes, isn’t she clever, Mrs. Becket?” said Violet, whose admiration for Grace’s talents knew no bounds. “I wish I was like her!”

“Nonsense, child! you’ll do well enough; indeed I hear you are quite a wonder as regards memory, and that in itself is a great gift. I hear you can say any amount of poetry by heart.”

“I know a little,” said Violet, modestly; “but that is such an easy thing, anyone can learn by heart.”

“Can they, though?” said Mrs. Becket, “it is a thing I never could do. I used to say I did not remember one line of poetry; but now I can’t quite say that, for Tennyson has kindly written one which even I cannot forget.”

“What is that?” said both Grace and Violet together.

Mrs. Becket looked mischievous, and her black eyes sparkled more merrily than usual at the question.

“Do tell us what the line is?” said Grace.

“Maud, Maud, Maud, Maud!”

said Mrs. Becket, “even I, prosaic as I am, can remember that!”

CHAPTER III.

“ Feel for the wrongs to universal ken,
Daily exposed, woe that unshrouded lies,
And seek the sufferer in his darkest den.”

WORDSWORTH.

AMONG the long and amusing catalogue of Tuscan proverbs, there was one which occurred forcibly to Major Armstrong's mind as he sat opposite the detective in the carriage and watched his countenance.

It was, “ It is a still stream that ruins the bridges.” Mr. Purway looked the very personification of a still stream, and Major Armstrong had no doubt in

the world that it was a stream which ran very deep, and might be very bad indeed for the bridges. Some faces seem made to act as a legible index to the mind within, while others (Mr. Purway's amongst them) serve to conceal the thoughts.

“A base, pitiful wretch, well fitted by Nature to be a spy,” Major Armstrong mentally stigmatized his *vis-à-vis*. And then his honest English blood began to boil at the idea of any human being condescending to such a life, quite forgetting that terriers are useful animals when rats have to be discovered.

Archie, in the meantime, was becoming extremely impatient at the delays. Never had the streets appeared so endless, never had the stoppages been so frequent !

He was sure that they were very late,

and it was only provoking to see the cool imperturbability with which Mr. Purway drew out his watch, as they stopped at the corner of the street in which Mr. Jones's shop was situated, and showed his employer that they had still ten minutes to spare.

"I always like to keep that amount of time in hand in case of accidents, Sir Archibald; but to be more than ten minutes too soon is worse than being too late in my humble opinion," said he.

Archie was striding on towards the shop instantly, in a violent hurry to get to the scene of action, but Mr. Purway checked him, begging him and Major Armstrong to cross to the other side of the street, and come as it were casually up to the door at the appointed time. In the meantime he went at

once to Mr. Jones, and concealed himself behind the hangings of some ancient tapestry in the back of the shop, where he could see without being seen everything that passed. It was a curious scene, and one which would have suggested a crowd of thoughts to an imaginative being.

The motley collection of things to be sold, the sombre colours of a London Winter's day, relieved only by a bright gleam from the open door of a stove in which a blazing fire had been kindled, the flicker of which was caught and reflected by the objects around, seemed to make the contrast of the general darkness all the greater. A large table in the centre was covered with antique bronzes, lamps, vases, &c, and with small vessels in dark pottery. Some of these things were real gems, others

mere modern antiques, or "Brummagem" imitation of gems. In the dim light it was difficult to know the difference between the real and the sham, between the antique and the modern imitation.

Had Mr. Purway been of a philosophical or of a moralizing temperament, he might have amused himself in the cloistered shade of his tapestried retreat with drawing parallels between the still life around and the real life so near at hand. But Mr. Purway was hidden away among the tapestries professionally, and he had, together with his family name, renounced philosophy and metaphysics as unprofessional.

He was watching and waiting, and had his thoughts fully occupied on the subject in hand, and no time or inclination for idle speculation. His professional astuteness was at stake, and

though he had affected to treat the matter lightly, a failure now would be a blot on his future career.

Just as the neighbouring church-clock struck the half-hour, the shop door opened and Major Armstrong and Archie sauntered leisurely in. As Mr. Jones had been prepared for them, he set them down before a case of antique rings and seals, in which they feigned to take a most lively interest.

Hardly were they seated when again the door was pushed open, this time in a more hesitating and feeble manner, and the woman so anxiously expected entered the shop.

Her veil was closely drawn over her face, and her step was feeble and hesitating. So much Archie could see without staring at her, as Mr. Purway would say, unprofessionally.

Mr. Jones was to refuse to pay the price demanded at first, so as to draw forth the expression of her eagerness, if she were indeed eager to part with the jewels.

This he did carelessly, turning them over again and again, holding them so that Archie could easily identify them.

They were Petronel's jewels, there was no doubt about it, and Archie's first impulse was to rush upon the woman and make her give up her stolen goods; but a warning kick from Major Armstrong, and a shake of the head from Mr. Purway, just visible to his client in his coign of vantage, kept him quiet.

Mr. Jones carelessly laid the bracelets down, but still toyed with the jewelled cross.

“This is a pretty enough thing,”

he said, "but I could hardly sell it alone, it ought to have a pair of earrings or a bracelet to match."

So saying he pushed it towards her, as if to finish the business. Then the woman, for the first time, displayed such animation, in her anxiety to get rid of the stolen goods, that she forgot her efforts at concealment.

"I have some ear-rings to match," she said, fumbling with the clasp of her leather hand-bag.

It was too dark in that crowded London shop, with the muggy Winter atmosphere, for her to see the fastening; she accordingly pushed back her thick veil hastily, and turning to the light of the stove displayed unthinkingly her countenance to the three pair of eyes that were watching her with such interest.

She was a middle-aged woman, tall, thin, and swarthy, with a pair of flashing black eyes, which blazed in her pale hollow face like glowing coals.

When she became eager and excited, as she did when Mr. Jones begged her not to trouble herself, as he did not want the jewels, she was a sight worth seeing. All her languor was gone, burnt up by the fire of the excitement that sparkled and gleamed out of those big black eyes.

She became fierce, rapid, and energetic in a moment, though her bodily weakness was evidently so great, that she had to clutch hold of the edge of the counter with her long bony fingers to support herself. There was a weird, hag-like look about her that was almost fantastic.

“Here,” she said, “my good man,

look at the ear-rings, they were thought very beautiful when they were given to me years ago; but I am an old woman now, and have no use for such things."

So saying, with trembling hands she drew forth the remaining contents of the bag.

Locketts, ear-rings, bracelets, and rings were all tumbled out in a heap and lay sparkling and glittering on the counter.

"Take what you like and name your price, provided always that it is a good one," said she.

At that moment Mr. Purway slipped out of his hiding-place with his most professional, stealthy, tread, and, beckoning to Archie, made his way to the side of the woman.

"I arrest you," he said, "in the

Queen's name for theft," and as his voice was heard in the silence, the woman covered her face with her hands and uttered a piercing shriek.

"Oh!" she cried, "I am undone! my boy! what will you say to me?"

In the meantime Purway having beckoned to a policeman, whom he had ordered to be in readiness, swept up the jewelry in his hands and passed it to Archie to identify.

"Yes," said Archie, "I have no doubt at all on the subject, these are the jewels stolen from my house on the occasion of my sister's wedding, and to make assurance doubly sure, I will open the secret clasp of this and show you the portrait of my mother, Lady Morton, which is enclosed in it."

So saying he took up the gold bracelet already mentioned, and touching a spring

showed that it enclosed a portrait which Major Armstrong and Mr. Purway were both able to swear to as that of Lady Morton.

All this time the woman was rocking herself to and fro in the chair into which she had sunk, sobbing and moaning most piteously.

“It was starvation, Sir, led him into it, nothing but sheer starvation. Oh, Sir! be merciful! take back your jewels and spare my son!” she said, in a voice almost lost amidst her sobs.

It was a very painful scene, and Archie, whose heart was excessively tender would almost have given in to her petition had it not been for very shame.

No, he had used every means in his power to trace the thief, and it would not be wise to let his mercy interfere

with his justice, and blind his eyes to what was right.

Archie was a magistrate, and had ideas of his own in respect to the laws and constitution of his country, and those ideas taught him that true charity consisted in supporting the right rather than in passing over the wrong.

Still the poor woman's sobs and tears went to his heart and gave him very severe twinges and pangs. Mr. Purway's professional manner now came into play, as a marked contrast to that of the two gentlemen.

He cross-questioned the woman now sharply, and now soothingly, and succeeded in a few minutes in getting the whole story out of her. Unwilling, as she was to implicate her son, to whom she was evidently devotedly attached, she became (to use Mr. Purway's own

favourite expression) as ductile as wax in his professional hands. In the suddenness of her alarm she had incautiously been betrayed into mentioning her son's name; now she would have given worlds to recall her words; but it was too late—they were spoken before professional ears, and stored up already in a professional mind.

Not many minutes had elapsed since they had entered the shop, before Sir Archibald Morton and Major Armstrong were in possession of the whole facts of the case.

The policeman sent two assistants to apprehend George Lamotte, the thief, at his wretched home, a small lodging in an obscure street, the direction of which was reluctantly given by his mother who was already herself in custody.

It was a sad story from beginning to

end, and it took some time and much cross-questioning from the astute detective before the whole of it could be gathered from the frightened answers intermingled with numerous sobs and ejaculations of the wretched mother.

It appeared that she was the widow of a French music-master and that George was her only son.

In her youth she had been handsome, gay and happy. Her husband had some small private means, and was much in request among the visitors of the French sea-side place in which they lived, and during the Summer season he generally had as many pupils as he could desire.

Suddenly came an illness which deprived him for a time of the use of his right hand, and this lost him his pupils and his occupation.

Seized with melancholy he became the victim of terrible fits of despondency, and at last seeing (as he imagined) ruin staring him in the face, he could bear the idea no longer, but put an end to his life which his morbid fancies had rendered such a miserable one. After this terrible event, Madame Lamotte could not bear to remain in France.

The gay promenades, the lively music of the military bands, the crowds of gaily dressed people, did not harmonise now with her sad and gloomy thoughts. She was an Englishwoman by birth, and she resolved to return to her native land with her precious and idolized son George, then a boy of twelve years. George inherited from his father a strong talent for music, but he also inherited from him a strong will and ungovernable passions.

Very soon he asserted his complete authority over his weak and doting mother, who grieved over his faults, but only adored him the more for them.

She tried to induce him to take to some trade, but the wilful boy inveighed against the monotony of a regular life, and considered the bare suggestion of such a course as an insult.

He would be a musician, an artist, a *maestro* ! Nothing could exceed his ambition except his idleness, and that was so great as to prevent his studying even in that art in which he was so anxious to excel.

The result was that, while believing himself capable of being a star of the first magnitude, he never could get beyond the outer circle of those small and insignificant luminaries which assist by

their combined rays in giving light to the musical world.

He got engagements at theatres in orchestras, but one manager after another dismissed him for insolence and unpunctuality.

At last he took to drinking, gambling, and dissipation of all sorts, so that his health suffered and his mother's slender means could no longer meet his numerous expenses. Then began his real fall. First one evening, on leaving the theatre, he picked up a ring which had been dropped, and, without reflecting for a moment, he took it to a shop and sold it. From that hour he felt that he was a thief, but unfortunately for him he was not found out, consequently his horror at the deed soon died away, and by degrees, as he wanted money, he no longer hesitated in helping himself to

any small things he could lay his hands on.

He happened to be passing Lady Morton's house the day of the wedding, and being in desperation at some new and heavy debts which were pressing terribly upon him, in a sort of madness the thought seized him of trying to enrich himself by a newer and bolder sort of robbery than he had as yet attempted.

There was a great deal of bustle and excitement going on in the house, and the street-door was constantly open to admit guests.

Seeing the footman standing on the steps waiting for a carriage just then coming up to the door, he walked quietly past him and, almost before he knew what he was going to do, he entered the house and slipped into a small cloak-room near at hand, where, with beating

heart and wild excitement, he watched his opportunity of either going upstairs or escaping again.

Fortune favoured him apparently, for he had not been very long in his place of concealment, before the whole party descended to the dining-room for the wedding breakfast. Presently the buzz of voices, and the popping of the corks of Champagne bottles told him that there was small danger that anyone would have leisure to remark him, so he ran upstairs as lightly as possible, and found to his great joy the drawing-room deserted, and the tables loaded with costly presents.

Here indeed was success beyond his most sanguine expectations, and without giving himself time for reflection, he filled the pockets of his great-coat with glittering gems, and slipped quietly down-

stairs again, letting himself out at the street-door so quietly that no one remarked him. What was to be done with the jewels now that he had obtained them was the next question.

He dared not sell them at once, much as he needed the money they would bring in.

He knew that a hue and cry would be raised on the discovery of the theft, and he determined on concealing the treasures till the time should come when he might deem it safe to dispose of them.

Soon all London was talking of the great jewel robbery, and the London papers, having nothing very particular to comment on at the moment, in the way of politics home or foreign, were very glad of the subject of interest.

So George Lamotte trembled as he saw

on all sides placards announcing the theft, and, hiding the jewels carefully away, tried to go on as if nothing had happened.

But guilt and the dread of discovery so unnerved him that he soon became ill, to add to which he drank deeper than ever. Consequently, within a week from the time of the robbery he was in a raging fever.

Poverty had come upon the widow now indeed, and starvation hovered as a spectre ever nearer and nearer. She nursed her son tenderly, for she was a fond, adoring mother, though her heart had often been wrung by his evil deeds.

She took no food, except what was absolutely necessary to sustain life; she did, for his sake, such work as a few years ago she would have thought herself physically incapable of doing.

Her money was all gone, and her son lay dying by inches before her eyes. She sold everything she could spare ; but days went by and hunger seemed to make her more and more feeble, and to quench the courage with which she had been wont to bear misfortunes.

All her own things were gone, but still her motherly love prevented her selling anything belonging to her son.

At last she could refrain no longer, and opening a box which he always kept locked, she turned over clothes and music-books, wondering what she had better risk selling first.

As she did so, a sparkle caught her eye, and soon the truth was made clear to her.

Jewel after jewel she discovered hidden away among the folds of his clothes. Her son was a thief ! That was the first

agonizing thought that crossed her mind.

Had he, indeed, sunk so low as this?

Then, turning in her bitter grief and anguish to the bed, anger in her heart, and words of wrath upon her lips, she saw that pale face, that wasted form, and the mother's heart was melted.

She could never have explained how it happened that, so short a time after the discovery of a crime which had made her turn cold with horror, she should have gone out into the streets of London, in the full light of day, to profit by that crime, and to sell those jewels she could hardly bear to look upon !

CHAPTER IV.

“ ‘Tis green, ’tis green, sir, I assure ye.’

‘Green,’ cries the other in a fury,

‘Why, sir! d’ye think I’ve lost my eyes!’ ”

MERRICK.

MR. PURWAY was one of those human moles who work unseen, without casting up the earth, lest their course should be discovered.

Man is eminently a hunting animal, and he is never so eager for the chase as when the quarry happens to be his fellow-man. But then there is a difference in hunters. Some pursue their

prey in a blood-thirsty manner; tracking it to the death for the sake of witnessing the agony of that death; while others conduct their sport on purely scientific principles. Given the prey, and the difficulty attendant on its capture, the task is so alluring that the punishment of the victim is a very minor consideration. It is the fun of the chase that is the thing, no matter what afterwards becomes of the thing chased.

Mr. Purway was a huntsman of this class. When he was employed on a job, his whole mind was given to it, and he never rested till he had traced his victim to his lair. When that was once done, his excitement was over.

The authorities of Scotland Yard which is the centre of the modern system of Metropolitan Police, take care to pick

out for the special service of detectives, men who have this inherent propensity strongly marked; and certainly Bow Street in its palmyest days did not turn out more intelligent detectives than we now possess.

Sir Archibald Morton and Major Armstrong had had many conversations with him respecting his calling during their hunt for the lost jewels, and had been much interested by his accounts of his personal adventures.

“The difficult part of the business to me,” said Major Armstrong, “would be the fear of being known. How is it that you can contrive to mix with beings of all sorts and classes without their instantly discovering that you are not one of them, and therefore are a person to be wary with?”

“That, Sir, is the general idea, but

I can assure you we soon acquire the habit of catching the tone and style of our companions; we also disguise ourselves very often as to dress, so as to pass unrecognised," said Mr. Purway.

"Then I suppose you adopt costumes according to who the people are amongst whom you are to work," said Sir Archibald.

"Just so, Sir Archibald," said Mr. Purway, "in this respect we follow the principle of Nature, who protects her creatures from danger by giving them coats of a colour somewhat similar to that of the soil they inhabit."

"I see what you mean," said Major Armstrong. "An arctic fox, for instance, is as white as the surrounding snow; and a hare's brown coat is scarcely distinguishable from the heath in which she makes her form."

“Just so, Sir,” said Purway, “for instance I went to an agricultural show last year in the dress of a small farmer; and last May meetings I went backwards and forwards in a Clapham omnibus every day for a week, in the dress of a Methodist parson, in order to get scent of a little job I had had a hint of.”

“That was rather too bad,” said Sir Archibald. “I am afraid you were a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

“Well, Sir,” said Mr. Purway, “it is a dodge often tried by the thieves, so why should it not be made useful by the thief-takers. I assure you those busses are pretty well worked; and in times of May meetings, or any religious festivities, the sober black and the white ‘choker’ are frequently assumed with a perfect knowledge of the ‘serious’ class of passengers so constantly on the road.”

Major Armstrong was much interested in these recitals, and the more he heard of the cleverness and shrewdness of Mr. Purway, the more did the thought press itself upon him that he might be made available in the clearing up of the Lashiel's mystery and the helping forward Donald Inverarity's marriage.

But he thought it better to wait till this affair of Petronel's jewels was disposed of, and then set about the other matter.

So he let it be for the present, and in so doing he let the golden opportunity slip ; for no sooner was George Lamotte in the hands of justice and the jewels identified and returned to their rightful owner, than Mr. Purway was sent to a remote country village to prosecute inquiries in another mysterious case which had come under the notice of the police.

Nothing could be done till he came back, Major Armstrong decided, so he must let the matter rest for the present.

"I hear our professional friend is in Somersetshire, Armstrong," said Sir Archibald Morton to him shortly after his departure.

"He *said* Somersetshire, therefore I should sooner think of looking for him in the Kyles of Bute," said Major Armstrong.

Archie laughed. "You are a good pupil of his certainly, Armstrong. I was green enough to believe what he said."

"I wonder what kind of costume the exigencies of the case require him to assume," said Major Armstrong. "I thought it rather a good joke when he said he took a leaf out of Nature's

book and likened himself in all points, as far as in him lay, to the company he was obliged to keep for the time being."

"Yes," said Archie, "acting on his own principle, he must have taken us for a couple of old fogies from some Debating Society, judging by his lavish use of polysyllables."

"He is a conceited ass, and was terribly dogmatical, but he did what we wanted him to do, so it's all right," said Major Armstrong, who had said nothing to Sir Archibald on the subject of the new job he had cut out for the detective.

Archie's heart was still, as he had told his little sister, tender on that one point, and any allusion to Janet Macpherson, or to her lover, made him wince almost visibly.

He was waking up from his feverish

dream, and coming back to his former calm self-decision and courage; only the natural pain was there, the jealousy, the humiliation, the heart-burning! Major Armstrong knew the symptoms of a sore heart well enough. He had suffered so much himself, that he was quite able to understand the extent of Archie's suffering, and to appreciate the nobility of his conduct. Archie was far from thinking himself noble, but he knew he had acted as an honest man and gentleman should act; and this knowledge helped him, though he never thought of it as a thing to boast of.

Altogether Grace was tolerably satisfied about him, she watched him constantly with those loving, penetrating grey eyes of hers, and she saw that time was healing the wound which had been so deep and so sore.

Almost at the same time that the jewels were found, the news reached the Morton family of Lord Delabole's death.

Not many days afterwards Petronel made her appearance, as she had to choose her mourning before rejoining her husband in Sussex. He had gone home at once to his father's funeral; and he had acquiesced in her wish that she should stay in London for a few days with her own people all the more readily, because he did not wish her first impressions of her new home to be gloomy ones. Petronel was bright and charming as of old, as she took her old place by the fire-side; and, being there without her husband, Grace and Archie could hardly persuade themselves that she was really married and was only among them as a visitor.

But she was Lady Delabole now, and, being out of her husband's sight, she was free to vent her pleasure at the fact by her gay, pleasant chat and merry remarks upon people and things in general.

Never had she looked so beautiful, never had she been so fascinating. Lady Morton was in a state of extreme delight, and, as Violet's visit was over, and she had returned to her cousins, the family circle was once more complete and unbroken.

"It is so like the dear old days again, mamma," said Petronel, as she leant her head against her mother's knee, after installing herself on her favourite low stool in front of the fire.

"Dear Pet! she was always so fond of her home," said Lady Morton, as she came into Grace's room that night after

leaving Lady Delabole to the tender mercies of her maid.

She seemed perfectly satisfied at having her darling back again, and Grace reproached herself for the slight pang of uneasiness she could not help feeling as she looked at Petronel.

There was a change in her certainly, Grace could not help seeing it; but her mother was perfectly unaware of it, and Grace herself could hardly have said wherein it consisted, though she felt it was there. She told herself that she was old-maidish and exacting, that there was no harm in Petronel's delight at her own freedom—still she could not help wishing that her beautiful sister had appeared a little less relieved and delighted at the prospect of being a week without her husband, and she felt that while he was in such real trouble and distress it was

hardly becoming in his wife to be so exceedingly lively and happy.

Meanwhile the husband was longing for her bright presence in that sad house in Sussex. It was a pretty place in the Summer when the sun shone, when the birds sung, and when the trees were green; but now it looked sad enough. Nothing indeed could well be more desolate.

The trees were bare and leafless, there was no sweet odour in the keen frosty air, and looking up at the house, every window was closed and the white blinds were drawn down. The thickets on each side of the avenue were tangled with dead weeds, each little twig covered with rime and hoar frost, which would have been beautiful on a bright sunny morning; but which, in the gloom of a grey wintry afternoon, only made the chill

scene appear chiller. Damp mists arose from dyke and fen and river. The bare trees looked sullen and black, while a great part of their trunks were hidden in the undergrowth of high wet ferns, and sodden moss, and beds of fallen leaves.

There the house stood at the end of the long avenue, looking weird enough and dismal enough with its closed window-shutters, to be a haunted castle, dreaded by all living beings.

A black east wind was howling round it, while a little snow still lay on the stone coping and on the ancient sun-dial.

But the dreariness of the outside was cheerfulness in comparison with the sadness within, when the new Lord Delabole, tired and cold from his long solitary journey, arrived to take possession of his own.

It was a sad coming home, no doubt—a sad termination to the honey-moon tour, which in his blind adoration for his beautiful bride he had imagined to be a period of such unmixed delight. But with all its sadness, all its gloom, I believe that John, Lord Delabole, was really less to be pitied in his heart of hearts than was Petronel, as she sat cheerful and gay beside her mother's hearth that very night in London.

CHAPTER V.

“Thy heart will feel—but will not move ;
Thy soul, though soft, will never shake.”

BYRON.

WE have all of us heard, from the days of our earliest youth, of the wise man of Thessaly. His history is in a few words a sermon by which we may do well to profit.

After being too impetuous, and by not looking before he leapt, getting into trouble, he did not sit down in moody misery to deplore his loss, he did not call all his friends and his neighbours

together to lament over his misfortunes—not he; he was much too wise a man for that. He had the true heroic stuff in him, he knew the way to fight the battle of life better than that.

Hear the grand words in which the poet has immortalized his course of action.

“And when he saw his eyes were out
With all his might and main,
He jumped into the quickset hedge,
And scratched them in again.”

And this was the philosophy the honest blacksmith, Steenie Robertson, preached to Inverarity, his chosen and trusty friend.

“Don’t give in, Donald, my man,” he would say, “never sit down with hands before ye and despair; go at it again, that is the maxim for life, go at

it again, and conquer it, and don't be conquered by it."

Steenie was a simple unlearned man, about the simplest and most unlearned in all the village of Lashiels ; but he had hit the mark this time, in his honest, blundering, good-natured way, with greater precision and force than many a cleverer man might have done.

It is not an easy lesson to learn, but nevertheless it is well worth the learning, that success is not attainable by a hop, skip, and jump, but by arduous, gallant perseverance, by efforts repeated again and again, and most of all by failures.

Yes, indeed ! if we have the right stuff in us at all, failures at the outset are the grand materials of success.

I believe Donald Inverarity took a good many people into his confidence on

the subject of his love affair. He was one of those individuals who can't keep their secrets. But among all his friends and counsellors there was no one in whom he trusted so completely as he did in Steenie.

“Give me your advice, Steenie, I know you are a canny lad, give me your advice and I will act upon it,” said he, when the Winter had worn away in uncertainty and the Spring had begun to bloom and to beautify the land.

Hope was everywhere, the hedges were green, the birds sang, the children gathered daisies, and the elders woke up from their Winter's gravity, and relaxed into smiles and occasional merry-makings. Susan Macpherson's engagement to Colin Lindsey was announced, and the conversation and gossip, to which this event gave rise, greatly added to Donald's wrath.

Who was Colin Lindsey forsooth that he should be gladly received by the family, while he, Donald, was rejected? To be sure Susan was vastly inferior to Janet, could not hold a candle to her, was not worthy to be spoken of in the same breath; but still it was aggravating to see him just walking quietly over the course, with no trouble nor opposition, and made so much of by that old curmudgeon, Andrew Macpherson!

It was enough to make one's blood boil from the crown of one's head to the soles of one's feet!

It was the injustice of the thing that made it so bad to bear!

Give a man only fair play, a fair field and no favour, and he has no right to complain if a better man than he comes and fights him, and knocks him down and wrests the prize from his

hands. That sort of thing is all right enough and honest enough; but this sneaking, snivelling business, this striking a man in the dark, when he is utterly unable to defend himself, this was the sort of thing to irritate one.

Such was the tenor of Donald's talk, such was the strain in which he made his moan to Steenie; while the brawny giant, scratching his head and staring meditatively into the forge fire, made answer as we have said, "Go at it again."

So Donald determined to take the bull by the horns, and in spite of Janet's frightened looks and anxious pleading eyes, he walked boldly up to the farmer one morning, as he was leaving the yard, on his way to superintend his field-labourers, and requested a few moments conversation with him. Donald was in

a firm, inflexible mood, and was not to be daunted by Andrew's malevolent scowl, or by the fierce way in which he clutched his heavy walking-stick.

"I'd fain speak a word with you, Mr. Macpherson, if you are willing," he said in a brave, hearty tone, very different from the quavering treble in which, since his illness, the old man spoke.

No answer was given to his request, unless a scowl of undisguised hate might be called one.

Apparently taking no notice of Donald, Andrew left the yard, whistling as he went to Tab, his trusty but surly old sheep-dog, to follow him. Tab had no pretensions to beauty, he was not even a decent-looking Scotch colley, but a mongrel cur with a short stump of a tail and a very unpleasant countenance.

Followed by this unprepossessing-looking animal, Andrew left the yard disregarding Donald in the most open and offensive manner.

Seeing this, and knowing by their tittering and nudging of one another that the farm servants saw it too, Donald's blood was not long in mounting to fever-heat.

Janet's white face at the door, and her beseeching gesture, were hardly noticed by Donald in his excitement. He had promised Steenie that he would abide by his advice, and his advice had been, "Go at it again," so now Donald was all impatience for the conflict.

Perhaps there never was a farmer less loved and trusted by his servants than was Andrew Macpherson. Had he been a millionaire he would probably have had his admirers and worshippers, even

though they might behind his back have called him "eccentric."

The word "eccentricity" would in that case have been merely a euphonism for something worse, as it was, not being a person of much worldly importance, the neighbourhood took no trouble to mince words in the matter. They called him selfish, mean and stingy, and many were the stories afloat illustrative of his low cunning.

"Master Macpherson, I've a word to speak with you," said Donald, as his quick strides soon brought him along-side the old man, still somewhat feeble from his illness.

"Well, man, I'm not deaf," said Andrew, in a surly tone, and still keeping his face turned away from Donald.

This was not encouraging certainly, but Donald's blood was up, and Steenie's

words, "Go at it again," were ringing in his ears. He determined not to be disheartened, so he plunged at once into his subject, neither noticing nor caring for the black looks of master and dog.

Tab was, as it were, Andrew's familiar, and snarled or fawned on others according to the light in which they were regarded by his master. A well-matched pair certainly they were, and they seemed to have some private understanding between them, for when at last Andrew turned to look at Donald, Tab flew at him with a hoarse bark ready to tear him limb from limb.

"Be sharp about it then, man," said Andrew at last, "I canna stand here the hail day listening to your havers."

"It's no havers, it is solemn earnest that I have to speak on," said Donald.

"I want to know what is the true meaning of the accusation you made against the memory of my father. He was a sight more honest than many a man who speaks evil of him now, anyway, and I am here this day to ask you to say in so many words the hail truth of that old business of the stills that you spoke of before."

"I never mentioned the stills," said Andrew angrily, "if your ain conscience has put the words into your head, that is no fault of mine. I never mentioned stills, nor whisky either! ye have gotten into sharper hands than ye thought of, young man, when ye set yersel to argufy with me; I warrant ye'll need a lang spoon to sup kail with Andrew Macpherson, for all ye think yersel so mighty cute."

This was not encouraging, but Donald was not to be daunted.

“If ye have no real accusation to make against my father, who is dead and buried,” he said, “why should ye be so set against me? Is there any reason in your dislike to me? Is there anything you have ever heard against my character which makes you object to me, Because, if there is, say so, and I will show you what is the truth of the matter. But if not, if it is only your own fancy, I must say I think it very hard that Janet and I who have loved one another tenderly from the time when we were babes, or next to it, should be kept asunder.”

Still Andrew preserved a moody silence, and still Tab growled and showed his teeth ominously.

“Will you withdraw your words and let me come openly to your house as Janet’s lover? or will you explain what

the objection is?" said Donald as calmly as he could. His temper was up, and he had the greatest difficulty in curbing his tongue.

"Be gentle with him, Donald, for my sake," Janet had pleaded with him. "Be gentle with him and remember his illness, and how bad it is for him to be agitated."

"She never considers how he agitates others," thought Donald, as he walked away to the encounter. Angry as he was with Andrew, and justly so, still Janet's soft voice, and her loving words, "Be gentle with him for my sake," rang in his ears, and kept him tolerably calm.

There was a spice of malice in every word which Andrew let fall, and even in the expression of his eyes, which made itself felt instantly and irritated Donald almost beyond control.

“If you will not tell me the whole history, Mr. Macpherson,” he said, as quietly as he could, “I must warn you that I shall leave no means untried to find it out. Already I know a great deal more about the matter than you imagine I do, and I am determined to leave no stone unturned to lay bare the whole.”

“As you please,” said Andrew, shrugging his shoulders with affected indifference. “As you please, but let me warn you that people who stir up mud are very apt to be choked with it, and find they get themselves into a waur pickle than they bargain for.

“I am willing to risk it at all events,” said Donald, “mud or no mud I’m inclined to believe that I am not the person who will suffer most from the stirring of it.”

“Indeed! and how do you intend to begin your meddling and muddling, for a sair muddle ye’ll make of it, or I am much mistaken?”

“I shall first of all try and discover what has become of Pat Donaldson,” said Donald fearlessly.

Andrew winced, and his evil-looking eyes cowered beneath their heavy overhanging brows; but he would not give in.

Kicking fiercely at Tab, who was following too closely at his heels, he appeared to derive some inward satisfaction from hearing the poor brute howl dismally.

“And who in all the world is Pat Donaldson?” asked he carelessly.

“Pat Donaldson is the son of old Donaldson, who had the management of the still up at the Dower Craggs yonder, years gone by. I believe it was called

Donaldson's still, but it really was not his at all, but your father's, and Donaldson was only his manager, and conducted the affair so that Macpherson's name should not be mixed up with it; for your father wished to pass among his neighbours as a God-fearing man, and one of the elect," said Donald quietly, quoting as nearly as he could the old woman's words.

Andrew glowered at him more than ever as he heard this, and saw that Donald was really on the right track, but he was too wily to show that he was moved.

"Ye're wrang there," he said; "my father had nothing to do with any of the still business. What happened up at Dower Craggs was no affair of mine, but your father could have told you a tale which would have made ye a little less

loose and incautious with your tongue gin he were alive."

"I wish with all my heart he was alive," said Donald; "it is enough to make him stir in his grave in horror, that such base insinuations should be made against his character."

"Better let the mud lie," said Andrew with provoking quietness, "better let the mud lie. I told you before no good would come to ye from the stirring of it; dinna ye fash yourself about bygones."

"But I must fash myself about bygones, when you yourself put those very bygones forward as a reason why I am not to marry Janet," said Donald hotly.

"Tak' my advice and let your father's memory be; respect for a parent is a very right and very proper thing, but

it may be carried too far, and it certainly is carrying it too far when a young man like you leaves his daily work to poke into corners for auld forgotten things," said Andrew in the same quiet tone which had irritated Donald so before

When Andrew Macpherson was in a rage he was as a fierce wild beast to be shunned; but when he was quiet he was far more dangerous. An angry lion may be a less formidable foe than a silky, beautifully spotted snake, and it was his softness, his quietness that alarmed Donald. If the old man had got into a passion and had raved and sworn at him as was his wont when excited, Donald would have known a great deal better how to deal with him. As it was, it was very hard to meet his cool impertinent manner by

one so open and so impulsive as was Donald.

“Wise as a serpent,” Andrew certainly was, and it was neither a pleasant nor a satisfactory sort of wisdom ; but he was not by any means as harmless as a dove, and the sharp glance of those wicked eyes might have said as much to anyone more prone to judge of countenances than was honest and simple-hearted Donald Inverarity.

“I’ll never believe ill against my father,” said Donald ; “ye may say what ye please about stirring up the mud, but I’ll always maintain that he was as honest as the day. He was in the Excise, and we all know that it is the thieves who most dislike the thief-takers. I’ll bet my life that he was never guilty of any crime ; if he trusted too far to the honesty and discretion of false-hearted

loons, he might perchance have been cheated as has been many another good man, but there is no crime ye can charge against his memory with any truth at all."

"Donald, Donald," said Andrew with a provoking air of quiet superiority and scorn which was extremely irritating to the young man, "if your mother had lived to see this day, your conduct would have brought her grey hairs down in sorrow to the grave. Why will you be so rash with your tongue? Do ye not ken that she spent her time and substance in hiding the misery he had caused, and it will be all of no avail if you, her only son, rake it all up afresh."

Donald was staggered by this speech. He did not trust Andrew, yet after all he was Janet's father, and surely she who was so good and pure must

have in some degree influenced the old man.

"I wish to rake nothing up, and I will rake nothing up if you will only consent to my marriage with Janet," he said, and Andrew smiled to himself as he saw how his mock heroism and wonderful placidity had had its effect.

"We'll talk about that another time, my lad," he said, "we'll leave that subject for the present. Wait till you are head-keeper and have a house fit to take her to, before you speak any more about a wife."

This was a wonderful concession! Did his ears deceive him? Could he have heard right?

The strange alteration in his manner rather staggered Donald, but he thought,

“Poor old man, perhaps his illness has softened him. Well I must not ask too much at once, I am sure I never expected to get even this half consent.”

And the wily old serpent smiled as he saw how eagerly the bait was taken, and trusted that now there might be no more talk of raking up the mud.

Andrew had, as the reader may guess, his own reasons for wishing to let the mud lie; but Donald was entirely taken in by his manner, and left him with more gratitude and kindly feeling than he could have supposed possible an hour before.

“How did he get hold of that information about Donaldson’s still, I wonder?” murmured the old man as Donald left him. “We must put him

off that scent, even if we let him have the beauty of Lashiels as his wife, eh, Tab?"

CHAPTER VI.

“Endearing waltz! to thy more melting tune
 Bow Irish jig and ancient rigadoon.
 Scotch reels, avaunt! and, country dance, forego
 Your future claims to each fantastic toe!”

BYRON.

THE London season was at its height, and society was becoming daily more distracted over the beauty and elegance of the young Lady Delabole.

Everywhere she was fêted, admired, and run after, and everywhere she was seen, her lovely face lighted up with a glorious smile, and her elegant figure was set off by the prettiest and most fashionable dresses.

“What hard work this is, Mrs. Becket!” yawned Major Armstrong, as he lounged up to his old friend one night in a crowded drawing-room at a fashionable party.

“Hard work, do you call it?” said Mrs. Becket, “I find it simply delightful; to my ideas this is a very amusing world.”

“Happy woman! to me it is a very dingy whity-brown place, with nothing but dull uniformity in it,” said Major Armstrong, who liked nothing better than drawing out his old friend and making her air her pet views on things in general.

“For shame, you stupid man! it must be all your own fault if you find it so. The world is to me a perpetual surprise; I never get into a railway-carriage without seeing somebody of an altogether new and amazing character, and I

scarcely ever take a walk without meeting with an adventure. Depend upon it, if the world is whity-brown it is because you wear neutral-tinted glasses; to me it is full of sparkling and ever-varying colour, with charming happy gleams of light and delightfully gloomy bits of shadow," said she.

"I really envy you and your happy endowment, Mrs. Becket," he replied, "I suppose it is that I am one of the crowd, and observe nothing strange about the walkers who are going along the same path with me; but I can admire without ever hoping to emulate your brighter temperament; to me all is dust and ashes, vanity and vexation of spirit."

He said this so gravely that for a moment Mrs. Becket imagined that he was in earnest; but the sparkle in his eye belied his words.

“You wretch!” she replied, “you ought to be had up for felony, trying to obtain compassion under false pretences. I was beginning to fancy some awful misfortune had happened to you; but you are all humbugs, you men, and I have made many resolutions not to believe a word any of you say again.”

“Made them to break them! I am sure you are not capable of such hard-heartedness. I should think your contribution to the pavement of a place that shall be nameless must be considerable,” replied Major Armstrong.

“Not larger than other people’s, I imagine,” retorted Mrs. Becket, “though for that matter, the pavement theory is all of a piece with the rest of your rubbish. Bless the people! where is the pavement to be put if the pit is bottom-

less? just answer me that simple question, will you?"

Major Armstrong laughed. "I declare, Mrs. Becket," he said, "you get more wicked and shocking every year; but come, I am not going to enter into such profound topics, I merely came here to-night because I was sure you would be here, and I wanted to tell you I have been seeing a good deal of a particular friend of yours lately."

"A particular friend of mine, Major Armstrong, I have so many particular friends—I can't guess, indeed, and I hate to be kept in suspense, so tell me whom you mean," said Mrs. Becket.

"Curiosity, thy name is woman!" said Major Armstrong, smiling, in calm superiority, at the excited old lady.

"I assure you I am not in the least curious, I never had a particle of curiosity

in my composition ; however, I am dying to know who this particular friend of mine is, so pray enlighten me," she replied.

"Do you remember the great *cause célèbre* the great jewel robbery, before which, in our world at least, Marie Antoinette and her necklace dwindle down into nothingness?" said he.

"To be sure I do, she's got on the sapphires to-night; but what has that to do with my particular friend?" said Mrs. Becket.

"Is it possible that you have already forgotten the exquisite detective, the canny Scotchman with his sandy hair, and his love of the fine arts?" said Major Armstrong.

"Oh! that man," said the old lady, all alive in an instant, and on the *qui vive* to scent out a new mystery. "The very word detective is delightful to me, be-

cause it instantly suggests something to detect, and I do dearly love finding out secrets."

"And yet you say that you have not a particle of curiosity in your composition!" said Major Armstrong. "Oh! Mrs. Becket, I am afraid Juggernaut's car has infected you, and you have taken to 'figures of speech.'"

"Well, what have you been seeing Purway about?" said Mrs. Becket. "Bless the man! how slow he is in coming to the point!"

"I have been employing Purway on a little business of my own, touching an old case of contraband distilling which took place years ago."

"Good gracious! what a stupid subject! and what can you possibly find to interest you in a thing of that sort? But you always were an amiable sort of

animal in spite of your satirical speeches and your would-be cynicism ; so I dare-say you are routing out this out of kindness to some one, if the truth be known," she replied.

"It is a romance in low life, Mrs. Becket, connected with the love-affair of an old servant of mine, who is anxious to clear the memory of his father, who is said to have been connected with some row in the Scotch hills about the smuggling business, as, until that is done, the girl's father will not consent to his marriage," said Major Armstrong.

"That sounds interesting," said Mrs. Becket, "and do you really mean to tell me, you dear, good Quixotic soul, that you are actually going to all the trouble and expense of employing a detective to ferret out this history for your old servant?"

“Well, you see, Mrs. Becket, he was a very faithful good fellow. He was in my troop in the Crimea, and afterwards he travelled half through Europe with me, and when I was down with a fever he nursed me through it as tenderly as a woman; so I feel in duty bound to look after him,” said Major Armstrong.

“I declare this is quite an interesting story,” said Mrs. Becket, her robin-red-breast black eyes sparkling with real, genuine delight. “Where is the young man now?”

“He is at Lashiels,” said Major Armstrong.

“At Lashiels?” said she, “that makes it doubly interesting. I always like to place the people in my romances, give them a back-ground as it were, and then group them in the fore-ground of my picture; it is much easier to do that, when

one knows the look of the place they live in, than when one has to make a sort of Tom Tiddler's ground from one's own imagination."

"I should think Mrs. Becket had imagination enough to conjure up whole continents at her wish," said Major Armstrong; "but I agree with you, it is pleasanter to place one's people."

"And what is he doing at Lashiels, is he in service?" she inquired.

"He is under-keeper to the laird," he replied.

"Under-keeper to the laird! to Sir Archibald Morton, do you mean?" said Mrs. Becket.

"To be sure, he is the laird of Lashiels; and the young woman is the daughter of Macpherson, the tenant-farmer on the home-farm," said Major Armstrong.

“I know—that pretty girl I saw in the village church there. Do you know I had my suspicions that the laird himself was rather sweet in that quarter?” said she.

“For shame, scandal-monger!” said Major Armstrong (who was not inclined to satisfy her desire for information on that subject); these two dear, good creatures have been attached to each other all their lives; quite a poetical idyll, a village romance, a sort of Colin and Phyllis’s affair; however, the father objects, and so poor Donald comes to me, and like a weak old bachelor as I am, I must needs put my finger into their pie, and try and turn it into a pie matrimonial.”

“It is quite like a sensational novel, as I hear young ladies say now-a-days, when anything the least out of the

common happens," said Mrs. Becket; "depend upon it, the father thought he would rather have master than man for his son-in-law, if my suspicions are correct, and that this old story of the stills is only trumped up on purpose."

"No, it was before he guessed anything of the kind," said Major Armstrong, inadvertently.

He had meant to be on his guard, and now this sharp old lady had wheedled the very thing out of him which he had never intended to tell her. He was very much vexed with himself, he had meant to be so very careful, and like a babbling idiot (as he called himself) he had given her the very information she wanted; for he was right in supposing that she had only guessed at Archie's admiration for Janet.

It was too late now; before the words

were well out of his mouth, the delighted sparkle in her black eyes told him that she had caught the thread, and was already stringing her choicest pearls upon it.

“You dear man! how pleasant it is to be right in one’s guesses!” she said almost before he had time to recover his breath, or to remember what he had done. “I am so glad I guessed right! Do you know I hinted it to Archie ages ago, and he got as red as fire, but he made no answer. Well, now I see what you are after, you are acting the part of a true friend, and you want to get the girl safely married to her old love, before the laird puts his foot again into such a dangerous neighbourhood.”

“I wish you had not been so sharp, Mrs. Becket,” said Major Armstrong.

She saw he was really vexed and provoked with himself for his careless slip of the tongue, so she very good-naturedly came to his relief.

“You must trust me, Major, I’m not going to make mischief. I can’t help being fond of seeing how the bones of other people’s skeletons rattle in their cupboards, but you may trust me not to make mischief. Poor Archie! I am fond of that boy. I am sorry he has had this trouble—did the girl respond to his liking?” she said.

“Fortunately she was protected by her true love for Donald Inverarity, my old servant,” said Major Armstrong. “But, Mrs. Becket, I really must appeal to all your feelings of honour and of generosity, and beg you to be especially silent on this subject.”

“I will indeed, you may trust me,”

she replied. "I never make mischief; besides a secret loses half its charm when it ceases to be a secret, and becomes common property."

"I can trust you, I believe," he said; "I should never forgive myself if Archie found out what I have done."

"Don't distress yourself, my dear sir, no harm will come of my knowing it; besides, as I tell you, I guessed it before, so you may salve your tender conscience with that pleasing idea," she said. "Mind you tell me the sequel of the tale, and if the charming detective is able to set things to rights between the interesting young couple and the old father. I assure you it is the prettiest romance I have heard for some time, and I am quite excited to know how it will end."

"I will be sure and tell you, Mrs. Becket," said Major Armstrong, "but

the oddest part is still to come ; do you know I am actually turned into a sort of amateur detective myself, and I am keeping watch over Purway !”

“What, another romance ?” said Mrs. Becket.

“No, not another romance, but part of the same one. I have reason to believe that Purway’s family have been in some way or other connected with Lashiels, and he knows something which may be a clue to this very mystery,” said the Major.

“How delightful !” said Mrs. Becket, clasping her hands in ecstasy. “How delightful ! Why, I declare there are wheels within wheels.”

Their *tête-à-tête* was at this moment brought to an abrupt conclusion by Sir Archibald Morton himself, who, with his partner, Lady Violet Ogilvie, had just

come to an anchor near his old friends in the corner.

“Hatching mischief, I’ll be bound,” he said, merrily.

“Not at all,” said Mrs. Becket, who was the first to recover her composure at this sudden interruption. “Not at all, we were only having a little sensible, improving conversation. What a lovely waltz they are playing!”

“Yes it is,” said Archie, “too good to waste, will you have another turn, Lady Violet, or are you too tired?” and away they sailed, gracefully floating off to the strains of one of Strauss’s best waltzes.

“A nice-looking couple,” said Mrs. Becket.

“Yes, very,” said Major Armstrong. He was on his guard now, and was not going to betray himself any more that night.

At that moment another couple danced by—Lady Delabole and a dashing young guardsman, one of her numerous admirers.

“She is certainly a real beauty,” said Major Armstrong, “though I cannot count myself among the throng of her adorers.”

“No, you were always sensible enough to see through her,” said Mrs. Becket, “that was what first made me like you Major at Lashiels. I saw then that you had sense enough to keep clear of the general Petronel worship.”

Major Armstrong felt that he had had enough of conversation on particular subjects with this very sharp old lady, so he adroitly turned the subject to a more general and less dangerous channel.

Society in all its phases came under

their notice, as with tolerable acumen these two good friends made their remarks on men and manners, women and want of manners.

“I declare, Mrs. Becket, I shall take to my tub again, if things go on in this way much further,” he said, after they had been watching a few of society’s manœuvres.

“Well, we all agree in hating the common herd as a herd, and in detesting meanness and transparent devices which one cannot help seeing, but at the same time the individuals are not bad; it is when you swallow them as a lump that they are indigestible,” said Mrs. Becket.

“Well, every member of society is his own Pope in this matter, and the creeds are of course innumerable, each refinement of belief condemning the creeds

below it; that is the difficulty. All profess to hate what they call vulgarity, meaning by that a difference from themselves in regard to a certain standard of manners, customs, habits, opinions, and even principles," said Major Armstrong.

"I never trouble my head about all that stuff and nonsense," said Mrs. Becket. "It does save so much trouble when people once understand that, right or wrong, you mean to have your own way. I established myself years ago on a firm basis, and I have never shifted since. People take me as they find me and I can't pretend to enter into all of what they call their 'social ethics.'"

"Yes, it is like the regular conventional play or sensational novels," said Major Armstrong; "people now a days seem to think life ought to be a series of

surprises or jumps. They keep on piling incident upon incident in the most lavish profusion, and yet at the same time one seems to have heard everything before, and to know all the tricks and all the springs by heart."

And so these two worldlings babbled on, innocently enough, in their corner. And so the strains of Strauss's lovely waltz flowed on in wonderful rhythm, and Petronel's eyes sparkled and her whole face glowed with pleasure, while in the corner, half hidden by a pillar, stood her husband, Lord Delabole, watching the scene.

CHAPTER VII.

“There, the long drooping boughs between,
Shadows dark and sunlight sheen
Alternate come and go.”

LONGFELLOW.

WITH trembling limbs and faint heart, Janet re-entered the house, after watching Donald join her father outside the gate.

She was terribly frightened at the mere idea of the scene which she conjured up in her imagination between them.

She loved Donald all the better for his boldness in venturing to beard the

lion, and to re-open the dreaded subject. She loved him all the more for it, and yet she wished he had not been so bold.

Her father would not consent, she felt sure, and then they would be worse off than ever. Probably hot, angry words would be spoken, which could do no good, and which would only have the effect of widening still further the breach between them.

Oh! it was weary work this waiting, this despairing.

What was it the Bible said? "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick."

Yes, but how much more sick it makes the poor bruised heart to have no hope!

She could not return to the kitchen, where Susan's self-satisfied smile, and "I told you so" look, were too much for her to bear at that moment.

She could not venture amongst the others just then, so she made her way to her own room, and throwing the window wide open, she knelt beside it and prayed—prayed for forgiveness for her many sins, for courage to meet the present trial, whatsoever it might be—for faith and strength to overcome temptation. When her prayer was over she grew calmer, the beating of her heart became less violent, and her thoughts more collected.

The day was one of those beautiful Spring ones when all Nature is waking up from its long sleep, and joining in the thanksgiving hymn which never ceases, though our hearts are often too dull to hear it. A gleam of sunshine fell upon her head as she leaned out of the window, and it seemed to her a heavenly messenger of peace and good-will.

She could hear the wind stirring the the topmost boughs of the trees in the wood, but below the air was still, and she could see the fresh green leaves reflected in the clear water of the river. It was a very peaceful scene, and the contemplation of it soothed her, and did her good.

Still, though calmer, she was far from being at her ease. The thought of her father's temper and of Donald's impetuosity was ever present to her, and she dreaded the consequences of this interview, stormy as she had no doubt it would be.

Would she have dreaded it less, could she have seen the sly look in her father's eye, or heard his mild persuasive voice? She knew that the dislike he had always felt for Donald was now fomented into positive hatred. She knew that since

his illness, the mere mention of her lover's name was enough to bring on a paroxysm of rage, violent enough to be called mania; but she knew also that his openly expressed rage, terrible though it was, was less dangerous than his secret malice.

What was to come of this interview she almost dreaded to imagine.

What was her amazement, after waiting quietly at her open window for about half an hour, to see Donald Inverarity coming up the path!

He was not flushed and excited, as if from victory after a severe conflict; and still less did he appear cowed and melancholy, as if he had suffered a defeat.

No, he was neither one nor the other; but there was a joyous springiness in his actions, a light in his eye, as he

walked briskly up the lane, which filled Janet with surprise.

The garden gate was shut, but Donald was familiar with its fastening, and drawing it back by thrusting in his wrist between the bars, he opened it confidently, as if quite at his ease, and perfectly convinced that he had every right to be there.

Looking brightly up at the house, he caught sight of Janet's pale face at the upper window, and, with a smile and encouraging gesture, he signed to her to come down to him. Janet flew, rather than ran, down the creaky old stairs and across the paved court-yard which led to the garden.

The mere sight of Donald's face, with the happy smile lighting up his handsome features, filled her with joy to which she had been so long a stranger that it was almost intoxicating.

“Donald, what is it?” she said, as he caught her madly in his arms, and began executing a sort of war-dance amid the trim flower-borders.

“Hurrah!” he exclaimed “glorious news! old Thorpe has the rheumatism so bad he is almost past work, and your father has said that he would listen to me when I am head-keeper, and have a house of my own fit to take you to!”

“My father said that!” said Janet in amazement. “Do you really mean it, Donald? But you can’t be trying to tease me on such a subject! and yet I can’t believe it.”

“Don’t believe it then, you little infidel,” said Donald, who was almost beside himself for joy; “don’t believe it then, and I shall have to tell it you all over again word for word, and waste my breath and my precious time into the

bargain. I can scarcely believe it either, but it is true, gloriously true notwithstanding."

"Do you mean to say that my father said that it would be all right if you were head-keeper?" said Janet. She was still too much astonished to be able entirely to credit this new phase of affairs. "Do you really mean that if you were to get made head-keeper he would consent?"

"Of course he did, at least he gave me a pretty broad hint to that effect, which I should be a fool if I did not act up to," said Donald.

Janet was silent, too much overcome by her feelings to speak, and Donald, though he had promised faithfully never to doubt her again, was a little disappointed by what he fancied was her indifference.

Disappointed that is to say for the first minute or two, while he was too excited to watch her face. But when he turned to look at her, and found how her large eyes were filled with tears, and how the colour came and went in her cheeks, he could not any longer accuse her of having no feeling.

“Janet, dear,” he said, at last, seeing how silent she was. “Janet, I don’t believe you are half glad enough.”

“Oh, Donald !” she replied, and with a sort of low “coo ” like a dove, she hid her blushing face on his breast.

Words cannot paint her feelings, indeed words are utterly powerless to convey any idea of moments such as these—moments of such unutterable bliss as to be almost agony.

Almost unconsciously, Donald and Janet left the garden, and wandered

off to the well-known walk by the river side—the walk which had so many memories for them both—the very walk in which Janet had first met the laird.

But she did not think of that now as she leant on Donald's strong arm, and felt that he was her protector, and that now there really seemed some prospect that the dream of both their lives might be accomplished, and that she might ere long be his wife.

The river glided on gently at their feet murmuring quietly, the rushes and willows waved to and fro in the soft breeze, and it seemed to the happy girl that all Nature knew and sympathized with her in her newly-found joy. For it was joy—joy, deep and unutterable, to find herself walking there with Donald, without that shrinking, frightened fear

that she was doing wrong, which had hitherto always marred her interviews with him.

The pleasure of being together was, for some time, so great that neither of the lovers stopped to inquire particularly into the actual terms of the permission which Janet took for granted her father had given.

What they talked about by the river-side, as they rambled along the green pathway, or seated themselves on the moss-grown trunks of the trees, I am not going to disclose to the curious reader. Mine is not the pen for impertinent or indiscreet revelations, and so I must leave each one to imagine for himself the theme of their discourse.

Whatever the topic was, it was a very engrossing one, and time slipped by unheeded, till at last Janet became

suddenly aware by the lengthening shadows of the trees that evening was approaching.

“I must go now, Donald,” she said, “I had no idea we had been out here so long.”

“I must be off too,” said Donald, hastily. “I had no notion that the time was getting on so fast. I hope I shan’t catch it from old Thorpe. One comfort is that now there is a good deal of night-work in watching the game, and keeping off egg-stealers, so that I may be allowed a little leisure by day.”

“But, Donald,” said Janet, anxiously, “tell me over again, before you go, exactly what my father said; I want to understand clearly what he means, and on what terms he intends that we shall be?”

“On what terms, Janet! how can

you ask such a question? of course we are now on the terms of an engaged couple, who have full consent to their meeting."

"Ah, yes; but have we his full consent?" said Janet, doubtfully, she knew her father's wiles and artifices so much better than Donald did. She knew him well enough to dread these sudden changes of temperature from hot to cold—from cold to hot. But Donald, with all a lover's impetuosity, cared for none of these things. To him a reluctant half-consent was speedily construed by his hopeful disposition to an entire one, and he had by this time worked himself up into the full belief that Andrew had given his consent that he and Janet should be married as soon as he obtained the post of head-keeper, which post, he had no doubt would soon be his, as

old Thorpe grew more and more ailing and incompetent, and Sir Archibald Morton had already promised that if he continued steady, he would not put in a new man over his head.

So far, indeed, things seemed to be satisfactory enough; but Janet's clearer mind scented danger in the air, and she could not bring herself to feel so confident or so hopeful as Donald did.

Still the present happiness was something, ay, and a great thing too, to the poor girl, worn and tired as she was by a life of daily disappointment, of vexation, and of care.

It was like coming upon an oasis, and having leisure to enjoy the green shade, and the refreshing water after a long and weary journey over a desolate, parched, and arid desert. Poor Janet had learned, by bitter experience, to

make the most of her bright spots when they came, to enjoy her short days of bliss, and to push into the background those ominous clouds of doubt and distrust that would keep rising on the horizon of her life. She had learned through trial and sorrow to try to make the best of things; so Donald's reasoning, all unreasoning and inconsequent as it was, found her a willing listener.

It was such a treat to feel happy for a little while, why should she forestall her misery by dreading what the morrow might bring? why should she not bask, for a time at least, in the sunshine of joy?—a sunshine to which she had been a stranger for a long time.

The necessity for expression is a great law of nature, and poor Janet had been so long obliged to keep her feelings pent

in, that the relief and delight of this free intercourse was greater than she could have thought possible. There must be some good and wise reason for that natural desire for sympathy which is so common in the world.

There seems to be something wanting, something radically wrong and incomplete, in those natures which do not need it, something inhuman in those who are incapable of understanding the great and tender bond by which all humanity is joined and bound together.

Andrew Macpherson certainly lacked this feeling, his was essentially an unsympathetic nature. He led a completely isolated life, and, so far as Janet could see, neither wished, nor cared for the love of others.

But with Donald and Janet the case was far otherwise, what they felt for

each other was something more—far more than words can express.

There was between them a bond of common pain and pleasure, of common fear and hope, and love and weakness. Yes, weakness, reader! you may stare at the assertion, but, paradoxical as it may seem, there is a great family likeness between weakness and strength in the world of the affections.

It is a pity to think that there should be so much love wasted in this world. Petronel's husband, for instance, was pouring the pure gold of a true heart's love on his wife, who received it with contempt, and was utterly unable to appreciate its value. Poor Lord Delabole! he had built his dream-house on the shifting sands, and he was yet to see the rains descend, the winds blow, and the waves beat upon it.

This afternoon's walk and talk had braced Janet up, and given her a fresh supply of strength and courage. It was well for her, as she came in late for tea that evening, that a neighbour had dropped in, for her mother was annoyed with her for being out of the way when she was wanted, and would probably have whined and found fault with her the whole evening, had she had nothing to distract her mind from the subject.

Fortunately, however, there was some bit of local news to be discussed, which changed the current of Mrs. Macpherson's thoughts, so that by the time tea was cleared away and the visitor had departed, Mrs. Macpherson's equanimity was completely restored.

Her father did not allude to Donald in her hearing that night, and Janet went

to bed only half satisfied, for there was a cruel malign expression in his eyes that belied his quiet manner. Her little sister, Emma, was perhaps her greatest comfort, and as she leaned over the child's bed to say a few affectionate loving words, she was rewarded by a tight hug, and the words in an affectionate whisper :

“Dear Janet, I do love you so, and I would much rather go and stay with you and Donald when you are married than with Susan and Colin Lindsey, for all Alice says they will be much richer and will have a far grander house than you will.”

“Hush, Emmy, dear, my own pet bairn, you must not talk of that,” said Janet ; but though she stopped her little sister's mouth, it was with kisses, and not reproaches. So Emma went to sleep quite

satisfied that it was all right with her favourite sister, and her happy dreams that night were of wonderful visits to Janet and Donald in a splendid palace of airy construction and somewhat peculiar architecture.

And Janet, if not so gay and light-hearted as she had once been, felt happier than she had dared to feel for months; and when her thoughts dwelt on Donald, and his true and faithful love for her, a thrill of real delight ran through her. It was only when she remembered her father's face, with that mingled expression of slyness and anger upon it, that she trembled again and felt doubtful as to the future.

She had met with very rough waves in her voyage through life, poor girl! How she did long for rest in some peaceful haven, where the still waters,

reflecting Heaven's blue, would seem to encompass her about with God's protecting love and care.

CHAPTER VIII.

“See Nature hastes her earliest wreaths to bring,
With all the incense of the breathing Spring.”

POPE.

AS Donald Inverarity was going home that evening in a state of blissful excitement, after his interview with Andrew Macpherson and his walk with Janet, he happened to pass the village inn.

Now the “Morton Arms” was an extremely quiet, not to say sleepy house.

It stood a little back from the village street, as melancholy and dismal a house,

to all appearance as a man was likely to come upon in a day's march.

Now and then a sportsman, more keen about his salmon than his personal comfort, might be found courageous enough to put up there for some weeks in the fishing season, but for the greater part of the year it was apparently guiltless of visitors. Nobody who was not ready to be a fakir, or to take up his abode in the Chartreuse, was ever bold enough to stay there unless he was fond of fishing.

To-day, however, an unusual bustle seemed to pervade the place; there was an air of sudden wakefulness about the house, very much like what one may imagine to have been the case in the palace of the Sleeping Beauty after the Prince had given the royal salute, and the lady had become wide awake. Donald was so accustomed to the drowsy inactivity of the place

that, preoccupied as he was, he was immediately struck by the change. The landlord stood before the door talking to the driver of a carriage, which from the thick layers of mud upon its wheels and the bespattered state of its body bore the unmistakeable appearance of having come a considerable distance.

The unusual sight had attracted a crowd of dirty little urchins, the veriest riff-raff and scum of the village of Lashiels.

Donald stopped suddenly in his quick walk, the tune he had been whistling dying away upon his lips from sheer surprise.

He began to think his brain was softening or something of the kind; how else could he account for what he thought he caught a glimpse of?

A gentleman has just been entering

the gloomy doors of the still gloomier inn, and Donald was sure that he recognised his old master, Major Armstrong.

And yet it was hardly possible that he would be there. The laird, and his mother and sister were in London, and the house at Lashiels was shut up. Colonel Power, the only other gentleman his master visited in these parts was abroad, so that he could not be going there.

It was very odd; Donald could not make it out, and was beginning to doubt the evidence of his own senses, when the sound of Major Armstrong's voice issuing from the inn-yard gave unmistakeable confirmation to his idea.

"My dear master, to think of your being here!" said he, as he ran across the street to where Major Armstrong now stood.

“Yes, Donald, I am here on business,” replied the Major, shaking the young man warmly by the hand, “and when you are at leisure I shall be glad to have a long chat with you.”

“Thank you, Sir, I am sure I shall like that very much,” replied Donald.

Can you come in to-night?” said Major Armstrong.

“I am afraid not, Sir!” said Donald. “I am behindhand with my work now, as it is, and there is a deal of night-watching to be done just now, as those Carlisle poachers are so terribly sharp after the fish; but if you will be here to-morrow morning, Sir, I shall get leave from Thorpe and come to you when you like.”

“All right, do so by all means. Be here by ten o'clock if you can, and I should like you to go with me for a drive, as I have business in the hills in which

you may be very useful," said Major Armstrong.

Donald looked doubtful. "I don't know how that may be, Sir, there is a good deal of work just now with the young pheasants," he replied. "However, I'll ask Thorpe and see what can be done. I am sure I need not say I should be very pleased to serve you in any way, Sir."

"I am sure you would, Donald," said Major Armstrong, smiling to himself as he said so, thinking that it was he that was going to serve Donald in this particular matter in hand.

"Well, go home now, and I will look in by-and-by at Thorpe's cottage to try to get leave for you myself, but I am glad to see you looking so bright. I was led by your letter to think that you were in the lowest depths of woe."

“Thank you, Sir,” said Donald, smiling; “I think things are mending a bit. The old man as good as told me I should have Janet as soon as I had a house fit to take her to.”

“Indeed,” said Major Armstrong, “that is good news; but I must not keep you now, perhaps I shall see you at Thorpe’s presently.”

“Yes, Sir,” said Donald, and off he went at a swinging pace, for he was conscious that his walk with Janet by the river-side had kept him longer away from his work than was quite right.

Meanwhile Major Armstrong returned to the inn, and ordered dinner and rooms for two. This done, he sauntered into the dingy coffee-room, where, over a smoky fire just lighted, leaned a tall, thin man, with sandy hair and a freckled complexion.

“Dinner won’t be ready for an hour or more, Purway,” said he, “what shall we do in the meantime?”

“Well, Sir, if it’s agreeable to you, I should say, looking at it in a professional point of view, that we might as well saunter down to the forge. There is nothing in that, Sir, nothing remarkable I mean, it is quite a common course of action on these occasions; travellers mostly do saunter down to the village forge when time hangs heavy on their hands at a village inn.”

“Very well, Purway,” said Major Armstrong, “I put myself entirely in your hands in this business you know, and whether we do it professionally or unprofessionally, I want to get to the root of the matter as soon as possible.”

“Just so, Sir,” said the detective blandly, “and I have very good reason

to believe that the truth is not far to seek, but that we shall set the matter to rights very shortly. Suppose we start at once as the sun is getting low."

Accordingly in another moment this strangely assorted pair were sauntering leisurely along the village street on their way to the forge.

"Whose farm is that—that I see to the right?" asked Purway, whose sharp eyes were taking in everything, and whose wooden countenance was looking almost animated.

"That is the Lashiel's home-farm," said Major Armstrong.

"Does the laird keep it in hand?" said the detective.

"No, he lets it to Macpherson, this very man we want to make inquiries about," said Major Armstrong.

"That is Macpherson's farm, is it?"

said Purway, who knew all about it perfectly before, but deemed it unprofessional to let private knowledge crop forth. "Well, I should think Sir Archibald Morton might find a more profitable tenant. Why, the whole place looks as if it were running to waste."

"Want of money, I fancy," said Major Armstrong. "I remember hearing Donald say, when I was here last, that the old fellow was very hard up."

"Humph! that's a pity," said Purway, "good land like this ought not to be allowed to be neglected; but this is the forge, I see. You go first, if you please, Sir, and remember the lock of your portmanteau wants seeing to. I hampered it myself before leaving the hotel."

Major Armstrong stared. This cool

experienced detective, who was always ready for action, and never hurried or flurried by anything, was a continued source of amusement to him.

His expedients were wonderful, and he had such a clever way of putting things in train.

The cheery light of the forge-fire formed quite a bright spot in the landscape, and looked all the more cheerful as the chill mists from the river were now rising and enveloping the valley in their grey evening curtains.

Steenie was working away with a will, the muscles of his brawny arms stood out as the muscles and sinews stand out of the marble in ancient statues of wrestlers and gladiators.

His big figure thrown into strong relief by the blaze of light behind him,

reminded Major Armstrong of pictures of Vulcan forging thunder-bolts.

He stopped working when he saw his visitors, and turned round to receive them with the natural grace and courtesy of a true man.

“Good evening,” said Major Armstrong, “you’re name is Robertson, I believe.”

“Yes, Sir,” said Steenie.

“I want you to do a little job for me, and get the lock of my portmanteau put to rights,” said Major Armstrong. “You are a bit of a locksmith, I suppose, as well as a blacksmith?”

“Yes, Sir,” said Steenie, “you see we are a gude step from a town, so here in this secluded village we maun e’en try and do what we can for ourselves.”

“A very good plan,” said Major Armstrong; then, catching a look from

Purway which seemed to imply permission to speak, he continued :

“ But it was not because of the lock of my portmanteau being broken that I desired to see you, Robertson, so much as because I know you are a true friend of Donald Inverarity's, and as he was my soldier-servant when I was in the army, I feel a great interest in him.”

“ Donald's a gude lad,” said Steenie, slowly and cautiously ; it was so entirely out of the line of his common experience that strangers should come to his forge and begin catechising him about his friends, that Steenie was puzzled.

It was not that he doubted Major Armstrong's word, or mistrusted him in any way ; but, as I have said before, Steenie was a slow thinker, and anything strange or out of the common way puzzled him

and made him feel quite bewildered. He required some little time to become accustomed to a new idea—when once that was done, no one knew better than Steenie Robertson how to act or how to give advice or assistance.

“Donald is a gude lad,” he repeated, slowly, as if to give himself time to collect his scattered senses.

“That he is, a right good fellow, and he always was a great favourite of mine,” said Major Armstrong. “I would gladly serve him if I could. I am glad to hear there is a chance now of old Macpherson’s getting over his dislike to him and allowing the marriage.”

Steenie had begun to (as he expressed it) set things right in his head, but this speech astonished him more than anything.

“Old Macpherson coming round!” he

said, "I never heard of it; it was only last night that Donald was here, and he never tellt me that at all, he was wearying at the lang, lang time the old man was making them wait."

"Well, all I can tell you is, that I met Donald not half-an-hour ago, and he looked as bright and cheery as a young bird, and told me that things were looking better," said Major Armstrong.

"I'm glad to hear it, Sir, indeed I'm glad to hear it. It seemed to me a crying shame that a fine laddie like that should be made miserable by the havers of a daft old fellow like Macpherson," said Steenie; "but I beg your pardon, Sir, for keeping you standing—you are Major Armstrong, I suppose? I have often heard Donald speak of his late master. I have no seat to offer you here, but perhaps you'll not think it

a liberty, if I ask you to step into my house which is nigh at hand."

"Thank you," said Major Armstrong; "but don't let me take you in. I can stand here quite well, if I do not interrupt you; I want you to tell me what this story is which old Macpherson has trumped up against Donald's father?"

"Eh, Sir, but that's just the tale I would like you to tell me. I canna make it out; it's my belief that Andrew Macpherson has a bee in his bonnet on that point, for from first to last his ways have been so perverse there has been no doing anything with him," said Steenie.

All this time Mr. Purway had been standing silently behind Major Armstrong, with a calm smile of superior wisdom playing upon his somewhat expressionless countenance.

Mr. Purway was so saturated with a well-assured consciousness of his own great powers and information that, when he was silent, and others were talking, he had the air which grown people often have when children are chattering before them. Amusement and condescending curiosity lent piquancy to his smile.

We all know how annoying it is to have a string of unmeaning sentences forced upon us, but it is still more irritating to have some ridiculous truism recommended to our understanding with as much pomp and circumstance as if it were a recent discovery in science, or an important message from Heaven.

And Mr. Purway's communications were often, to a quick-witted man like Major Armstrong, excessively tiresome, and the way in which he flourished his superior information in his face was aggravating

in the extreme; but he was bearing it all, and putting up with it all, to aid Donald.

At last Purway stepped forward, and addressing Steenie for the first time, said, "Will you oblige us by telling us what you know of the stills at Dower Crag?"

Steenie was, to use his own expression, struck of a heap when this new actor appeared on the scene. Who was this man? and where had he seen him before? His face seemed strange, and yet familiar, and puzzled Steenie more than ever.

"I know little enough of the stills at Dower Crag," he replied—"they were broken up when I was a mere boy; but my old mother knew something about the business, and if you'll come into the house we'll see if we can mak' anything out of her."

“Well, come along,” said Major Armstrong. “We shall be glad of any information on the subject, as I have come to Lashiels with the firm intention of probing the matter to the core, and clearing poor Inverarity’s character, if I can.”

CHAPTER IX.

“But welcome fortitude and patient cheer,
 And frequent sighs of what is to be borne!
 Such sights—or worse—as are before me here—
 Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.”

WORDSWORTH.

THE village of Lashiels, though consisting of but few houses, wandered up and down hill in the most extraordinary curves and twists, according to the lay of the ground on which it was set.

Indeed, in some parts, the street was so steep that in frosty weather a cart could hardly get up or down. From

the forge to the inn the ground rose abruptly, and as Major Armstrong and Mr. Purway followed Steenie to his house, the sun was setting, and the streams of molten gold seemed to rest on the very path from which they had come. To Major Armstrong the scene was a very beautiful one, that peaceful village wrapped in a golden cloud of evening calm, as if God's protecting care were visibly descending upon it.

It was very beautiful and very quiet in his eyes, but Mr. Purway heeded it not apparently, but walked on after Steenie, as calm and unconcerned as if he had been in the dingiest street in the city.

He could never have understood the charm which is felt by many in the mystery of Nature.

His wits were always too busily at work

in ferreting the dust out of holes and corners to be at leisure to acknowledge that there was a secret which no detective could ever hope to find out.

To him the earth was earth, the sky was sky, the clouds were clouds and the whole machine was a very simple and common-place one, far beneath the notice of one who could find out the wheels within wheels employed in the sin and crime manufactories of the world.

He usually went to work in an entirely calm and professional manner, when employed on the delicate pieces of business that were entrusted to him; but on this occasion his calmness was assumed, as he himself was so much mixed up with the story he was to discover that he found it difficult to keep his professional and unprofessional memories distinct.

Entering the cottage, it was at first too dark to see anything; but gradually their eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom they began to distinguish objects.

The old woman sat crooning over the fire in her own especial corner of the ingle nook, and Janie was lying as usual on her low couch opposite.

“Eh, Steenie, the lum is reeking!” moaned the old woman, as Steenie went up to her and throwing some peats upon the fire kindled them into a blaze which soon lighted up the small room cheerfully.

“Nay, nay, mother, ye’re dreaming, this lum never reeks,” said Steenie kindly, adding by way of an explanatory note to his guests, “she’s getting daft-like, Sir, and she is always thinking of her auld home, and I mind now she speaks of it, that the chimney in the house she

lived in when father was alive, did reek terrible."

"Is this your wife, Robertson?" said Major Armstrong, going up to Janie's side, and taking her thin hand between his own strong ones. There was something about Janie Robertson, her helplessness, her quiet patience, which always made people take a fancy to her at first sight; and Major Armstrong, who had heard of her from Donald, was made conscious, by a lump rising in his throat as he looked at her, of the feeling of sympathy she inspired.

Her bright cheerful manner added to her charm, and Major Armstrong soon found himself quite at home in this humble abode.

Steenie, with Janie to back him up, was quite at his ease now, and very soon related to Major Armstrong all he knew

of Donald and Janet's love affair, and the hindrances thrown in their way by Andrew Macpherson.

Hearing Janie talk of Janet in that low, clear bird-like voice of hers was very touching. She, poor, shattered invalid as she was, spoke so proudly and exultingly of her friend's grace and beauty, and seemed so entirely to rejoice in her joys and weep for her sorrows as if they were her own, that Major Armstrong became more than ever interested in the whole affair.

Looking from one to the other, from the huge muscular husband, full of overflowing life and impulse, to the poor, pale, suffering wife, it was indeed difficult to realise that these two beings, so unlike in every way, should be all in all to one another as they evidently were.

But the greatest contrast often makes

the firmest and truest friendship, so long as one is as it were the complement of the other. Janie's upturned face was lighted now by the flickering flame of the fire; and, on it might be read as in a book, the history of a character tried and purified by the burning, fiery ordeal of affliction.

In youth it seems strange to see here and there one person marked out for peculiar suffering; but Major Armstrong was no longer young, and had come to realise the woes of others in a wider range of sympathy, and to see that the personal grief, though no less painful, can better be borne, as a single drop in the vast ocean of man's sufferings, than if set up by itself as a thing isolated and alone.

Apart from his liking for Donald, and his wish to serve him, he was beginning

now to be genuinely interested in the whole story as a story. As Mrs. Becket would say, he liked to place his people, and that simple village home wove itself most harmoniously into the web of the romance.

“Do you think your mother will help us by giving us a clue to the old story?” said Major Armstrong.

“I canna say, Sir,” said Steenie. “What think you, Janie, woman?”

“You see, Sir, she is very auld and feeble, and the most of her time she just dozes over the fire, as you see her now; but at times she’ll rouse hersel and begin to speak of all the old forgotten days, and fancy herself young again, and then you’d be surprised to hear how clearly she talks,” said Janie.

“You did manage to get her to talk about the stills at Dower Crag, one night,

Donald tells me,—do you think she would now ?” said Major Armstrong.

“ I canna say, Sir, mayhap she would if you or this other gentleman were to ask her questions ; we find sometimes that a strange voice will rouse her, when we may talk to her for an hour without her paying any heed.”

“ Purway, you go and talk to her,” said Major Armstrong.

Mr. Purway rose and crossed the room ; but instead of going straight up to the old woman, he drew a chair to the opposite side of the hearth, and seating himself so that she could see him plainly, crossed his legs, folded his arms, and looked straight into the burning embers. The other three watched his movements with curiosity, not unmixed with surprise.

Janie's heart beat faster, as the thought

came suddenly into her head that the strange gentleman might be mad.

He was a queer-looking man, too, and though well-dressed, and apparently travelling with Major Armstrong as his friend, he was evidently not a gentleman.

At first the old woman's eyes were shut, and she seemed neither to know nor to care anything about her strange *vis-à-vis*.

At last, after the detective had sat still some two or three minutes, which seemed to the lookers-on very long and tedious, she suddenly opened her eyes, and fixing them on Purway, said, in a quiet voice, and with no appearance of surprise :

“ Well, Donaldson, it is a sight for sair een to see you amang us again ! How is it you have kept awa' from all your auld friends sae lang a time ? ”

“It is a good many years ago since I left these parts,” said the detective, quite quietly; but with a broad Scotch accent which Major Armstrong had never noticed in him before.

“Ay, ay, it’s a lang, weary time! a lang weary time! and I’m ower lang out of my grave; my sight is going dim, and my hearing too, and I’m only a cumberer; sometimes I’m thinking the Lord’s forgotten me, He’s sae lang coming for me.”

“Hoot, toot, mother, don’t say that,” began Steenie, in a cheery voice; but the detective motioned to him to be quiet, and went on with the conversation without appearing to notice the old lady’s last speech.

“It’s a good many years since I left these parts, and what with bad seasons with the crops, and the row up to the

Crags with the Excise, I'd well nigh settled in my mind I'd never come back no more," he said, in the same strong Northern tongue which had so surprised Major Armstrong before.

"Hoot, man! but it was yer ain fault that the Excise got wind of ye. Macpherson and his son were a sight mair canny than ye—they would never have let on about it. I believe it was that boy of yours, Pat, that got drunk one night, and let out to young Inverarity, who was in the Excise, some of the goings on. I canna tell how else they got wind on't; but how is it ye are here now? I thocht ye'd been dead and buried years ago!"

"Here I am in the flesh, you see, and glad enough to have a crack over old times," continued Purway, who was evidently too wide awake to let the old

woman relapse into imbecility if he could help it.

“Here I am in the flesh sitting before you, and I want to know a great deal about our old friends up on the hills.”

“Weel, but ye maun be cautious and not betray me,” said the old woman, with a cunning twinkle in her dim eyes that was in itself almost a phenomenon of nature.

“Never fear,” said the detective, “all’s right between friends; tell me what happened when the Excise got wind of it.”

“Weel, there was just a row indeed, and the warst of all was that it was whispered abroad that your son, young Pat Donaldson, had become acquainted with a roguery of the Macphersons, father and son, and that they conspired to get rid of him, fearing what he might

tell of them," said the old woman, who was now warming thoroughly to her subject.

"But ye'll no believe harm of the Macphersons, woman," said the detective; "the Macphersons are God-fearing folk, and the auld man is known for ane o' the elect."

"Whisht! don't you go to believe such lees," said the old woman, angrily; "my man always said he'd sooner trust the deil hissel than either o' em. Why, dinna ye ken that the still was theirs up at the Dower Crag? You and yours only held it in their place, that their names might be kept back. And there was waur than the stills; auld Macpherson was a money-lender, and mony a piece of siller stuck to his hands that never got there by rights. He would lend to puir folks, and pretend to be sae

gude to them, sae merciful and Christian-like, like ane of the elect, as they said, and then when he found they could not repay, he would be down upon them and seize their goods, and turn them out o' house and hame. Eh! but if he was ane of the elect, I'm not for ganging into sic like company, I'd liefer bide with puir ordinary honest folk that have nae pretentions to godliness!"

"But what became o' Inverarity?" resumed her companion, who seemed determined to cut short her irrelevant reflections and to keep her up to the mark.

"Oh! Inverarity was a brave chiel—there was nae fault in him, forbye they did say he fired the shot which killed young Pat Donaldson—but if he did 'twas only in the course of duty he used his gun, besides which they never found the young

laddie's body, and I'm of the opinion mysel that he was never shot at all, but that Macpherson's lot paid him to keep out o' their way."

"Indeed," said the detective. "But was it not generally believed that the puir laddie was shot at, and his body flung down over the Dower Crag, in among the thick bracken and heather, where none could go to search for it."

"That's nowt but folk's talk, Sir, I'll never believe it; why, Macpherson had his ain reasons for wishing to get rid of the callant," said she.

"Indeed! and what were they?" said the detective.

"I'll tell ye, though I warrant ye heard rumours of it at the time," said the old woman. "It was one night that Macpherson and his son were putting their heads together over some papers; deeds

or something of the sort belonging to a neighbour who had got them to lend money on 'em—and they were just trying their hands at copying ither bodie's writings, which more by token I've heard was an old trick of theirs, when young Pat Donaldson, who was a wild kind of laddie, had somehow got hidden in the room unbeknown to them, and just as they had succeeded in signing some ither bodie's name on to a bit of paper—they, thinking themselves alone, and mighty proud of their cleverness—out rushed Pat Donaldson, and like a wild ill-mannered gossoon that he was, seized the paper and ran away wi' it. Ye may fancy what an upset there was, and what a baddish time puir Mistress Macpherson had amangst them!"

"What sort of a woman was she?" said the detective.

“She was but a puir soft creetur, and her man had a wonderful long tongue, to be sure, and quarrelled with a deal o’ folk up and down, and he was right down vexed wi’ the callant, you may depend,” she said.

“But if Pat Donaldson was murdered, why was it that the Macphersons were not suspected of having had a hand in the matter, they being known to have a grudge against the lad?” said Purway.

“No, no; they knew better than to let out the secret, so no one knew this story of the forged check but me and my man. We heard it from puir Mistress Macpherson, who could na’ keep it in, puir woman, but came over ane evening in the gloaming and told us all about it, and not only that but they Macphersons people were always superstitious,

and the Minister had just preached awfu' curses against him that sheddeth innocent bluid, and I ken weel that they would not have dared to do it with these words in their ears," said the old woman.

"But do you believe the young man was killed, after all?" asked the detective.

"I never did and never will believe it, but I know it was for Macpherson's interest to say so, and they put it about that Inverarity the Exciseman had used unfair means and foully murdered the lad," said she.

"But perhaps they really believed it," said Purway, "and if so they may have felt glad to get the laddie safe out of their way."

"No, I'm sure they did not believe it," said the old woman, "ye may hoodwink the craw, but hardly the

kestrel, and they Macphersons were always sharper than ony ither bodies in Lashiels."

"And you believe then that Donaldson's laddie ran off with this forged paper, and the Macphersons had to buy him off," said Purway.

"The laddie ran off wi' it, ye may tak' yer oath, and it's borne in upon me that they paid him to keep awa'," said she.

The old woman seemed to be entirely transformed into a new being in her excitement at this narration, and neither Steenie, his wife, nor Major Armstrong could take their eyes off her.

It was wonderful, they could not understand it. There was this stranger sitting carelessly in front of the hearth, and by his judicious questions, getting out of her a full, true, and particular

account of the very transactions they had tried so hard to get at.

It was all the more astonishing as for months past her small remnant of memory seemed to have deserted her, and, sitting cowering as she did over the fire, hour after hour, you would have thought she never would again have been able to utter any comprehensible words. Now here she was, sitting almost upright, waving her thin claw-like hands, and wagging her old head with an animation which put Major Armstrong forcibly in mind of a galvanized skeleton he had seen in the days of his youth.

"Then what do you think became of young Pat Donaldson?" said the detective, quietly, as if he was asking the most ordinary question in the world.

"How can I say?" she replied, rather

angrily, as if she were suddenly aware that she was under cross-examination and did not quite like it. "How can I say? His banes may be amang the bracken below Dower Crag for aught I can tell."

At this moment the peat, which had been blazing merrily on the hearth, and sending rays of cheerful brightness through the room, suddenly collapsed.

This trivial incident turned the current of the old woman's thoughts in an instant. She cowered down in her corner again, in her usually inanimate attitude, and saying softly, "Steenie, lad, the lum is reeking," she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

CHAPTER X.

“Men can counsel, and speak comfort to that grief
Which they themselves not feel; but, tasting it
Their counsel turns to passion.”

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

IT was evident that no more was to be
got out of her at present.

Sunk again into almost hopeless imbecility, it was difficult to realize that in that wasted frame there had been so much vitality only a few short seconds ago, or that that vacant countenance was the same which had so lately been lighted up with shrewdness and intelligence.

We all know the look of a village

which, after having gone mad with all the festivities of its annual feast, suddenly awakes to find the saturnalia over, and so falls back for another twelve months into its usual state of tranquillity. The excitement is over, the reaction has set in.

But cakes and ale do not last for ever; neither is country life all beer and skittles; so old Mrs. Robertson could not be expected to keep herself up to fever heat when the excitement of the fair was over.

No, it was evident that nothing more could be made of her.

The first thing these conspirators did, when the old lady had fairly nodded herself into a profound slumber, was to look at each other and laugh.

There was something comical in the notion, that what all the pumping of the

combined forces had failed to elicit, should have flowed forth spontaneously from the well-spring of her poor jaded memory.

“’Pon my word, Purway,” said Major Armstrong, “you are a clever fellow. How you did it, I can’t tell; but you have succeeded in getting the story in a far more complete form than I could have supposed it possible. What a lucky thing it was that she took it into her head that you were an old friend.”

The detective smiled, but said nothing; and Janie expressed her satisfaction that the interview had been so successful.

“What will ye do now, gentlemen?” she added. “Have ye the courage to tell Andrew Macpherson what you have heard?”

“What do you say, Purway?” said Major Armstrong, “you have pluck

enough for anything; do you feel equal to bearding the lion in his den?"

"All in good time, Sir," said the detective. "We have gained so much information here this evening that I think we may say that matters are now in a very satisfactory state; but there is one intermediate stage that requires to be gone through before we go to Macpherson's."

"What is that?" said Major Armstrong.

"Does it not strike you, Sir, that at present we have only hearsay evidence. If we were to go to a man—sharp and cunning as I believe Andrew Macpherson to be, and tell him that all the evidence we have is from the lips of a poor old woman, who is almost too feeble and aged to be relied upon, he would not believe it, at least, he

would say he did not, and stand out that it was all a fabrication?"

"Indeed that's just what he wad do," said Steenie; "ye're right there, Mr. Purway, and a mighty cute gentleman you seem to be, if so be as I may tak the liberty of saying so."

"We must have a proof of the truth of the matter," said the detective, quietly.

"But, my good fellow, where are we to get it?" said Major Armstrong. "We have heard the whole story, and we four witnesses can swear to the truth of every word of it."

"No, Sir; that's just what we cannot do. We can swear to having heard the story from the old woman's lips, but we cannot swear that she did not invent it."

"I could," said Steenie, firing up in

defence of his mother's truth and honesty. "I could, I am sure I could swear it is all Gospel truth. My mother never told a lee in her life."

"Nay, my good friend," said the detective, "I do not doubt her in the least; *I* believe every item of her story, and am much indebted to her for telling it to us; but for all that we must have some more real proof of the whole concern before we accuse him of forgery."

"To be sure," said Major Armstrong, rather despondingly. All had been so prosperous, so straightforward and plain-sailing, up to that moment, that he was dreadfully disappointed at this sudden check; but his clear head enabled him to see in a moment that Purway was right, and that to bring an accusation of so grave a nature against a man, it

was important that the evidence should be complete.

“To be sure,” he said, “you are quite right, but where we are to get a proof sufficiently strong, after all these years, to convince *him*, passes me to imagine.”

“Leave it to me,” said the detective, “leave it to me, and I have very good reasons for believing I can lay my hands upon a proof before many hours have gone by.”

“I am glad to hear it, I am sure,” said Major Armstrong, brightening up considerably under the influence of his companion's assured manner. It was getting late, so taking leave of Steenie and his wife, with many promises that they should soon hear the result of their inquiries, and many cautions to them to be silent in the meantime, they wended

their way up the hill again to the village inn, in the gathering darkness.

Their dinner had been ready for some time, and the landlady was beginning to be anxious about them.

“The fogs were rising from the river,” she said, “and she was afraid the gentlemen, being strangers to the valley, might have missed their way.”

Though the old inn had appeared gloomy enough, and dismal enough, by daylight, when they had arrived, yet, coming into the cheerful light of the best parlour on their return from Steenie Robertson's house, it looked far from uninviting. The fire burnt brightly on the hearth, and the table was set for them within reach of its pleasant warmth.

Though the Spring was advancing, and the sun at mid-day was beginning to make

itself felt very powerfully, yet, in the evening, a fire was by no means an undesirable thing, and the two *conspirators* (as Major Armstrong felt that they were) drew their chairs to the hearth as soon as dinner was over, and made themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

“How was it that the old lady took so kindly to you, Purway?” asked Major Armstrong, “was it because of an imaginary likeness to her old friend, Donaldson, or was it from your strong Northern accent? which I must say you put on remarkably well.”

“A little of both, I should think, Sir,” said the detective, quietly, as he held his glass up to the light, and appeared wholly engaged in the contemplation of the colour of the liquor within.

“ This profession of yours must be an amusing one, take it all in all,” said Major Armstrong, “ and I should think that now that you are so near your old home, as I think you said Lashiels was, you must find it especially curious to be ferreting out behind the scenes the holes and corners of other people’s lives.”

“ It is a curious sensation, Sir, and though I do not generally like to mix my personal recollections with my professional discoveries, I do not mind telling you that in this particular instance, if my memory serves me well, I can put my hand before long on the very clue we want to make our story complete,” said he.

“ Indeed, I am delighted to hear it ;” said Major Armstrong, “ I suppose I must not ask you what that clue is ?”

“All in good time, Sir,” said Purway. “All in good time. I hope soon to be able to explain what is left of this mystery; but I would rather not tell you to-night.”

“Very well,” said Major Armstrong, “and for fear I should be tempted to ask you any more questions, I will go now to the keeper’s lodge, and get old Thorpe’s permission for Donald Inverarity to accompany us to-morrow. You are still of opinion that we ought to go to the Dower Crag to see for ourselves the scene of the supposed murder?”

“Yes, Sir, I think we should;” said the detective, “and with your permission I will arrange with the landlord about a trap to take us there in the morning. Can you be ready by ten o’clock?”

“Oh, yes; you make what arrange-

ments you think fit, and I will fall in with them," said Major Armstrong, as he prepared to go.

"Better not tell Donald Inverarity what we have heard to-night, Sir, if you please," said Purway.

"No—I won't tell," said Major Armstrong, "I will leave the grand *coup de théâtre* to you. I will merely hold myself in readiness to do the heavy father business, and say, 'Bless you, my children,' at the end of the play."

So saying, he walked off, leaving the detective to his own meditations, which must have had an exciting, not to say exhilarating, effect upon him, judging by the change in his demeanour. As soon as the door closed, and he was left alone, his first act was, by instinct, to go to the door, to make sure it was properly fastened, and to satisfy himself that he

was really safe and free from witnesses or eaves-droppers.

Having assured himself of his absolute privacy, he next began to execute a sort of lively war-dance, a compound of Irish jig, and Scotch reel, and rigadoon (whatever that may be).

An entirely new substance may be composed of well-known materials, and so it was with Mr. Purway's impromptu dance, though perhaps its component parts were nothing but hops, skips, and jumps, yet they were so blended, so arranged, as to form a new and harmonious whole.

When he was completely out of breath with the liveliness of his performance, he sank back in his chair by the fire and laughed aloud.

"To think that it should have come to this!" he exclaimed. "It is really too

amusing, to think that I should now be employed professionally to find out facts which, unprofessionally, I have known for years. It is the best joke I've heard for many a long day."

Here his breath having returned to him, he indulged himself for a few minutes in a game of leap-frog over the chairs.

"To think," he continued, "that that doited old girl should have talked to me so quietly thinking I was my own father; and to think still more of the three lookers-on who never guessed who I was. If Macpherson had kept to his bargain and paid me my money regularly, they might have whistled for a long time down the wind before they would have got me to help them in their nice little arrangements. But he is a shabby old fellow and not to be trusted,

and the funds are 'lang a-comin',' and below the agreement when they do come, so it is time to show him up. If he has broken his side of the bargain, he can't expect me to keep mine, and the state of his farm settled me this evening. It is but too plain he won't be able to pay up much longer."

Here he rang the bell, and when the landlord answered the summons, it was a thousand pities no one was there to see the sudden change in Mr. Purway's countenance and manner.

The calm, superior way in which he arranged about the trap for to-morrow, the finished London manner with which he complimented the landlord, upon the dinner, were too good pieces of acting to be performed without an appreciative audience.

"Fill your glass, landlord," he said in a

lordly, condescending manner. "Fill your glass, and tell me how far it is to Dower Crag, and what sort of a place it is when you get there."

"Weel, Sir, it's a matter of ten mile off, and the roads are heavy just after the rains, and the hills are mighty steep. All collar work for the puir beasts. However, mine are unco' canny creatures, and are used to hills, forbye they see little enough of level ground here. Ye need na fear, Sir, they'll get you there safe enough, and our Tom knows every mortal step of the road, having been reared among the hills hisself."

"We ought to be off at ten o'clock in the morning then," said the detective, in his calmest and most matter of fact manner. "It is rough walking in the quarries, and there is no knowing how long our business will take us. By the

by was not there an ugly story in days gone by about the Dower Crag?"

"I believe so but I cannot say for certain, Sir," said the landlord, "I'm a stranger in these parts myself, having bought the business from a friend—at least he was a friend once."

"He took you in, did he?" said the detective, laughing; "it's a case of save me from my friends, I suppose."

The landlord nodded and smiled grimly, the subject was evidently a sore one, and one he was not much inclined to pursue.

"I wonder you don't try a bold game and start a little amusement in connection with your house—it would pay, depend upon it. Billiards for instance, a cricket-club, or pigeon-shooting, that is a fashionable amusement now-a-days," said Mr. Purway, with the air of one quite competent to give good advice.

The landlord shook his head doubtfully ; he was evidently a man without much pluck, and dreaded nothing so much as exertion and thinking for himself.

“ He'll never make his fortune,” said Purway to himself contemptuously. “ Now I come to think of it, was there not a curious old dove-cote at the Dower Crag—a curiosity in its way, built by some eccentric old man ages ago,” he continued.

“ Yes,” the landlord said, “ and there it is still. I saw it the only time I ever went to the quarries.

“ Any birds in it ?” said the detective carelessly.

“ No, Sir,” replied the landlord. “ I should say it had been empty and untouched for the last thirty years. It is a queer-shaped affair, and solidly built for a thing of the kind, so I suppose no

one has taken the trouble to touch it."

"And the road is up-hill all the way you said?" said Purway.

"Yes, Sir, and a pretty steep hill too, but my nags will do it if you only give them time," said the landlord.

"Well I'm tired, so I'm off to bed," said Purway, "you can tell the other gentleman so when he returns," and yawning loudly he retired for the night.

CHAPTER XI.

“And forth into the fields I went,
And Nature’s living motion lent
The pulse of hope to discontent.”

TENNYSON.

MAJOR ARMSTRONG had once or twice since he left London called himself a Quixotic fool for meddling in other people’s affairs, and heartily wished himself back again in his well-known lodgings.

Now, however, he was far more sanguine of the results of his expedition. The old woman’s story had interested him, and the information she gave had thrown

so much light on a hitherto rather obscure subject that things looked very hopeful in his eyes.

In fact, as he drove with his two companions, Donald and the detective, the next morning through glorious scenery, he felt thoroughly happy, and as if he was "off for the holidays."

It is not the mere change of air which is so beneficial to travellers; it is the new experiences and changed surroundings which carry healing on their wings.

He had had trouble enough in his life, poor man! trouble enough and sorrow enough to account for his frequent fits of morbid irritability. But he was learning by experience that that recreation is the most truly recreative, which takes us into a new world, and opens a wider horizon to our observation.

Recreation should take us out of ourselves in fact, and enable us to merge our cares and forget our anxieties in the pleasant occupation of strewing flowers in the pathway of others.

It was a real delight to him to watch Donald's bright smile, and to picture the happiness he was to be the means of bringing to this young couple.

It was a beautiful drive, first up a gradual incline through forests with trees beginning to wake into life under the fingers of that delicate and graceful artist, "Spring."

Primroses and little blue flowers were twinkling in the soft mosses at their feet; the air was full of insects, midges, gnats and butterflies, which had turned out in swarms to revel in the golden comfort of the sunbeams. Presently the winding road brought the travellers to the top of the wooded

hill, and with a sudden turn a lovely and surprising sight burst upon them.

Clouds were drifting and tints changing, a great purple amphitheatre of rocks spread out before them, while below them the thousands of tender-green tree-tops swayed like ripples on a Summer sea.

It might have been the beauty of the scenery, it might have been the brightness of the day, it might have been both combined which did it, but something certainly had enlivened Mr. Purway considerably. He was always catching himself, as it were, in little furtive laughs, catching himself up, making himself prisoner, and dressing himself in a sort of mental strait-waistcoat.

But every five minutes or so, he escaped from his self-appointed bondage, relapsed into chuckles, and had to be caught and made captive again.

“That purple rock in the distance is Dower Crag, Sir,” said Donald, after they had paused a few moments to let the horses breathe, and had now fairly started on the more rocky ascent.

There it stood, grand and solemn, with a sort of *corona* of white mist gleaming on its head, bounding the view.

The rocks near it were scarred and seamed, partly by Nature's hand in the old, old days long ago, when she drew pictures on stone with sharply pointed ice-pencils for us to wonder at now, and partly by the more puny efforts of modern quarry-men.

The effect of these bright gleams and chasms on the skirts of the dark cliffs was very vivid, very wonderful, and yet so natural that Major Armstrong asked himself where the wonder of it was.

It was a charming medley of sights and

scent, and fresh air; the water in the babbling, bustling rivulets sparkled brightly in the sunshine. The shadows trembled and quivered on the hill-sides, or lay quietly at rest in the rocky chasms. Birds fluttered and colours thrilled through the air, while the beautiful outline of Dower Crag was clearly cut out against the blue sky. Its stern smoothness and pillared strength were scarred and cleft, but the scars were soft, in some places ruddy with lichens and moss, in other more exposed spots veiled by Nature's careful hand in a scarcely discernible semi-translucent haze.

The ascent was long and toilsome, but it was accomplished in due time, and when the poor jaded horses stopped at last where the road ended, and the quarries began, Major Armstrong and his

companions jumped out of the carriage eager for fresh discoveries.

Not that he himself or Donald could quite see the object of their drive, as the still had long ago been turned into quarry-men's houses, and it was extremely unlikely that any trace of whitened bones would be visible among the gorse and heather to throw light on the subject of the murder.

But they trusted themselves entirely to the detective; and as he seemed to think that to-day's excursion was a necessary part of the performance, they submitted to it readily enough.

Major Armstrong thoroughly enjoyed the beautiful scenery, and I think Donald did too, though his head was too full of Janet and of his freshly revived hopes, for him to pay much attention to what he saw.

“We must climb to the houses, and see where the old still was, I suppose?” said Major Armstrong.

“Yes, Sir, certainly,” said Mr. Purway; “that is what we have come all this way for. Don’t you hurry, however; I was trained to mountain climbing as a boy, so I will go on first, and make a few investigations, and you can follow at your leisure.”

No sooner said than done. With the agility of a wild goat, and with breath by no means exhausted by his dancing performances over night, he started on his climb, and was soon far in advance of his companions, who followed more leisurely along the steep and stony path.

“He’s a sharp fellow, Sir,” said Donald. “I can’t quite make him out. How strange he is in his manner to-

day, almost as if he had a secret of his own to hide, instead of one of other people's to find out."

"Yes," said Major Armstrong, "he puzzles me a good deal. I fancied before I left London that he was somehow mixed up with Lashiels, but I suppose I was mistaken, for no one seems to know him, and he does not appear to claim acquaintance with anyone."

"Thorpe was saying last night, Sir, just before you came into his house, that he had seen some one drive to the inn with you this afternoon so like a man he knew was dead and gone, that for a moment he fancied it must be a ghost," said Donald.

"Well, we shall read the mystery some day, I suppose," said Major Armstrong; "that is always supposing

that there is a mystery to read. But, in the meantime, tell me about Janet. How does she bear up all this time? It must be a hard lot for her."

"Yes, indeed, Sir," said Donald; "but she acts like an angel, which is as much to say she acts like herself, for she is one."

"Oh! of course, Donald," said Major Armstrong, "all women are angels till they are proved to be the contrary; we know that very well."

"You may laugh, Sir," said Donald; "but if you half knew what poor Janet has to put up with, and how good and patient she is, you would agree with me."

"My good fellow, I do agree with you perfectly. I am sure she is a very sweet, good girl; and I shall think you a very lucky fellow if you get

her for your wife," said Major Armstrong.

"Indeed I shall be, Sir," said Donald; "and I am most grateful to you for the kind interest you take in our troubles, and for the help you are giving us to set matters straight."

"Don't mention it, my dear fellow," said Major Armstrong. "I shall be amply rewarded when I see you with your bonny bride at your side next time I attend your village kirk. I am so glad Thorpe gave you leave out to-day. I suppose this is a busy time of year for you."

"Yes, Sir," said Donald, "our hands are pretty full of work now; this is always a lively season. What with the young pheasants just hatched, which require constant looking after and feeding; and keeping watch for fear of

salmon poaching down the river, our work is pretty well cut out for us now."

"Any salmon spearing done now?" said Major Armstrong.

"Yes, Sir, there has been in this neighbourhood, and one has to be on the look out, and to let the poachers know that we are up to their games."

"Of course," said Major Armstrong; "but how fast that fellow walks. I declare he is out of sight already."

This was true. Purway had gone bounding up the hill with astonishing lightness and agility, and had reached the top long before the others had accomplished half the distance. They were in no hurry, however, and beguiled their way by a long chat on sport of every kind.

Salmon, grouse, pheasants, partridges,

hares, and all sorts of wild fowl came under their notice, and their conversation was enlivened by so many sporting anecdotes that it was a long time before they arrived at the end of their journey.

At last, however, they stood on the Dower Crag, and viewed the scene of the tragedy of long ago.

Real murder or not, the spot could not have been more wild, more romantic, or more impressive in its solitary grandeur.

“Good heavens! what a splendid view!” said Major Armstrong, as he paused to take breath, and gazed with wonder and admiration at the glorious scene before him.

Glorious indeed it was, and almost overwhelming in its beauty; and Major Armstrong could not help giving a great

gasp as he took in at a glance rock and fell, wood and moorland, broken foreground and lovely blue distance stretching away into an unknown space. He wondered at it, but he had room in his heart for it all; and it seemed to come and nestle into the great void he was conscious of having there, filling it with peace, and joy, and happiness.

CHAPTER XII.

"Most unexpectedly I found myself
Spectator of a scene in a home-drama
Worth all stage-tragedies I ever saw."

G. MACDONALD.

SO engrossed had Major Armstrong been by the beauty of the view stretching below him, that he had not given himself time to think of the detective, or to wonder what had become of him. He was roused at length from his reverie by an exclamation of surprise from Donald Inverarity.

Emerging from a quaint old dove-cote built at the back of the house, which

had once been the still, was Mr. Purway. But not Mr. Purway, the calm, the unmoved, the strictly professional; no, no, indeed, a very different being.

If I may venture to use such an undignified expression, concerning such a dignified creature, I should say that his whole countenance beamed with jollity.

Hot, tired, and dusty, indeed he was, but in the very height and triumph of pride and success.

Waving some small object above his head, he made his way along the rocky pathway, till he rescued his wandering companions.

They had been so taken up with their conversation on the interesting topics already noted, that they had forgotten how slowly they had walked and how much time the detective had had to himself.

“Look here,” he cried, “see what I have found! I knew it was there! I put it there myself twenty-eight years ago, and I thought the pigeons would not know the value of it, but would leave it alone.”

More amazed than ever, Major Armstrong and Donald stared at Mr. Purway in dumb astonishment.

The same thought which had struck such terror into Janie Robertson overnight, occurred to Donald now. The man must be mad! His strange manner all the morning, and now his wild way of talking could only thus be accounted for.

Major Armstrong, more cool and self-possessed, was not so aghast as was Donald, and was soon satisfied that the detective was not mad, though evidently much excited.

“What is it you have found? and what have the pigeons to do with it?” said he.

Mr. Purway seated himself on a stone to recover his breath and then producing an old and cracked bottle, he began his story.

It was a long one, and as it was often interrupted by his hearer's remarks, questions, and exclamations, it will be better to give it in a narrative form. It will not be the surprise to the astute reader which it was to Donald Inverarity, to be told that Mr. Purway the famous London detective, whose advice and assistance had been sought by Major Armstrong for the unravelling of the Lashiels mystery, was no other than Pat Donaldson himself.

He had been a mere boy at the time of which so much had been made at the

Dower Crag. A mere boy, and therefore in no way seriously to blame for the part he had taken in the matter.

The old woman's account of his running away with the forged cheque was strictly true, though at the time he seized hold of it he had not the smallest idea of its value.

The old man and his son, or, as they were commonly called in the village, "they Macphersons," had been always objects of great dislike to the juvenile population of the place, on account of their harshness and their grinding dispositions.

Pat had worked for them now and then, but had been discharged from their service on account of his high spirits and what they called 'dangerous levity.'

Happening to be at the still one day

half asleep in his father's office, the Macphersons, father and son, entered the room, and not seeing him, set themselves to work over business accounts.

Pat, being well hidden in a dark corner, and very sleepy and comfortable, did not move, and they went on with their affairs, entirely unconscious that they had a spectator.

At first the boy was too drowsy and heavy to notice anything, but by degrees his attention was roused to the fact that they were doing what they would hardly have cared to do in the full light of day, and in the sight of their neighbours. The father was copying the handwriting from a deed which the son held in his hands, and both were so much interested in their work, that time slipped by unheeded.

At first the boy, Pat, tired out by a

long ramble through the hills, slept soundly in his dark corner ; but when he woke and recovered his scattered senses, he, being sharp and quick-witted, soon perceived that there was a mystery. What that mystery was he was not long in finding out.

After writing the same name over and over again on a slip of common paper, Macpherson at last grew bold by his success, and proceeded to sign it at the bottom of a blank cheque, which somehow or other was in his possession. Now Pat saw in a moment that this was an important secret—how important, however, he did not know.

He was sufficiently wide-awake to be aware that a forged cheque was a dishonest means of obtaining money ; but it did not strike him then that the fact of the forgery, if it came to be known,

was enough to blast the good name of father and son, and to put an end for ever to that outward respectability to which they attached such great importance.

What was the horror and amazement of the Macphersons, when the cheque signed and that part of the business completed, suddenly Pat Donaldson sprang from his corner where he had been lying unobserved, seized both the cheque itself and the bit of paper on which the trials had been made, and bounded away with them.

An active, quick boy, he was soon far out of their reach, and the father and son were left behind gazing at each other in speechless terror! They dared not leave the house and run after him openly, for they knew that the Excise had got wind of the illicit distilling of

whiskey, they carried on under Donaldson's name, and they did not care to risk being seen about the place.

Besides, what would be the good of giving chase? Pat Donaldson was well-known as the fastest runner, the most active climber among the hills, and they should never be able to catch him.

Seeing their anxiety only made Pat the more determined on carrying out the trick he had planned. Here was a fine opportunity for paying them out for the slights and indignities they had shown him, for the number of times they had got him into trouble with his father, who was a very strict man, and little tolerant of boyish freaks. He had got the paper, and he should hide it. The next question was, where would be a safe place to put it? He knew that his pockets might be searched, and that no nook or corner

of his own home was safe from the sharp eyes of his mother, who had a mania for cleaning, or as she called it "sorting" her house, a process which generally ended in her putting everybody in it out of sorts.

No, it would never do to attempt to hide anything from her in the house, so he began to cast about in his mind, and to think of all the odd chinks and crannies he knew, in order to decide on a safe hiding place.

He must get it safely disposed of somewhere before he saw the Macphersons again—that was evident, if he meant to keep it from them long enough to give them a real, good fright. But where? that was the question.

Running along, with the papers safely folded in his pocket, he suddenly came beneath the shadow of the old dove-cote.

A remarkable building, now left to ruin and decay, but which had once been erected by an eccentric laird, as an ornament to his property; but the eccentric laird was dead, and the property, now divided, had passed into other hands, and only "Stewart's Folly," as the dove-cote was called, was left as a memorial of what had been.

It was in ruins now, and no one had cared to touch it, or to spend money on keeping it in repair. Pat was under the shadow of this curious old building, when it struck him that here indeed would be the very place of all others in which to hide the paper.

No one would think of looking for it there, indeed very few people were rash enough to attempt to climb up into it.

Nothing daunted Pat Donaldson, how-

ever, one of those boys who know not what fear is.

An empty bottle lay in the grass at his feet, and into this he stuffed the forged cheque (keeping the slip of paper with the names on it in his pocket) then, climbing nimbly up to the first row of pigeon-holes he stuffed the bottle with its precious contents into one of the empty niches.

“They’ll sneeze finely, gin they hunt for it there,” said he to himself, as a cloud of dust, long unstirred, blew out of the hole and almost choked him.

He kept away from home till the shadows of evening were beginning to fall, then hoping that the Macphersons had left the hills, he walked quietly back.

Just behind his father’s house, however, he was caught and seized by the very

people he was anxious to avoid. They tried first threats and then bribes to get him to give up the papers; but he was obstinate and deaf to all entreaties. The more he saw they really wanted them, the greater was the fun of thwarting them.

No, no, the Macphersons had bothered people enough, and tried people enough with their mean ways, now it was his turn to play. The ball was in his hands, and he was not inclined to relinquish it without seeing the game out.

At last, finding threats of no use, they had resource to bribes.

“Was there nothing the boy wished particularly to have or to do?”

Tempted in this way, at last it came out that Pat Donaldson's great wish and desire was to go to London—to see the world, and to be made a man of.

After much bargaining, it was at last settled that Pat was to receive money for his journey, and a certain fixed sum to be paid annually as long as he stayed away and kept silence on the subject of the forgery of which he had been witness. He would not give up the papers—he was too sharp for that—for he knew that, as long as he had them concealed, he had the whip hand of both father and son, who, knowing their characters and position to be at stake, would not dare to refuse to fulfil their share of the contract.

So that very night, the same on which the Excise came down upon the still, Pat slipped quietly away in the gloaming, and was on his way to Carlisle before his absence was commented upon.

When the fight was over, and people had time to draw breath after the excite-

ment, his father and mother first missed him.

A pistol shot had been heard in the course of the struggle between the Excise and the distillers, and Inverarity, Donald's father, was known to have a weapon of the kind in his pocket.

It suited the Macphersons, therefore, to trump up the story that young Pat Donaldson had been killed; shot through the heart by Inverarity, either intentionally, or in the course of a struggle and his body thrown over the Dower Crag.

Days, weeks, and months passed by, and as no tidings could be heard of the lad, by degrees the good folks on the country-side accepted the story as truth, and in consequence of it the Dower Crag became shunned as a place of mystery and horror. People in the hill-countries are

generally very superstitious, and it did not take much time to start a few terrific ghost-stories, horrible enough to prevent even the most hardy peasant from searching too minutely for the traces of murder under the Dower Crag.

So years rolled on and the place was shunned as haunted, and even the stoutest-hearted of the quarry-men spoke in whispers of the strange sounds heard at night amidst those wild rocks.

Meanwhile Pat Donaldson, always a daring and high-spirited youth, who had long chafed at the monotony of a country life, went to London, and by degrees got up the social ladder, until he found himself in all the glory of the well-known blue uniform belonging to the army of Scotland Yard.

In six months from the time of his

joining the force, he had become a steady police-officer.

The wild young fellow, who, only a few months before, knew no restraint, had become, outwardly at least, a machine ; moving, thinking, and speaking only as his instruction-book directed. Stiff, calm, and inexorable, he seemed to take no interest in any mortal thing, to have neither hopes nor fears.

Amidst the bustle of Piccadilly, or the roar of Oxford Street, this Scotch youth was soon to be seen stalking gravely along, an institution rather than a man.

Being naturally sharp and shrewd, he soon evinced his strong hunting propensities, and was selected as a detective.

Many mysteries had he been employed to find out, many dark holes and corners had he been given to rummage, and still

years went by and he heard little or nothing of his old home in the Scotch hills.

Once a year, on a fixed day, a small sum of money was sent to him by agreement from the Macphersons. He took it, and kept the secret, and at last almost forgetting the power he had over his former enemies.

By degrees, however, the payments became irregular, and he had more than once been obliged to write and remind Andrew Macpherson that he was not sticking to his part of the contract.

For the last year or two he had not received more than a quarter of the stipulated sum.

And so it came to pass that when Mr. Purway, as he was called, was employed to discover Lady Delabole's stolen jewels, the sight of Grace Morton's sketches, particularly of the one of Lashiels Bridge,

had such an effect upon him, that in spite of his professional stoicism he began to long to see and hear something of his old friends. Twenty-eight years had gone by, and he had changed from a youth into a middle-aged man, but, nevertheless, the home-sickness came so suddenly upon him, that it was almost a delight to him when Major Armstrong told him of the business in which he wished for his assistance.

He was tolerably accustomed to queer things in his professional experience, but this surpassed all.

That he, of all people in the world, should be selected to find the proofs of his own murder, struck him in such a comical light that it was with great difficulty he could preserve his professional gravity during his journey with his employer.

This was the substance of his story, told as it was to Major Armstrong and Donald—the proof, if proof were needed, was the forged cheque, which he had discovered safely folded in the old bottle in the dove-cote, where he had himself put it twenty-eight long years ago.

CHAPTER XIII.

“Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.”

LOVELACE.

WHEN Mr. Purway, or Donaldson, as we must now call him, had finished his narration, his listeners sat for a moment or two in dumb amazement.

“I never heard such an extraordinary story in my life,” said Major Armstrong. “Now I see why you were so anxious that we should come here to-day, and also why you were so sanguine about finding the necessary proof.”

“Yes,” said Donald, “I can never thank you enough for clearing my father’s memory as you have done. Now, what will Andrew Macpherson say to me, I wonder? He cannot have the face to continue his bare-faced lies when he is confronted with such evidence as this.”

“Oh, we’ll make it all right for you, Donald, my man, never fear,” said Major Armstrong, kindly. “I must get myself some dancing-shoes, I foresee, for your wedding will soon come off now I suppose.”

Donald looked radiant with happiness, and was so absorbed in his own brilliant prospects, that he could hardly take in the successive steps which had led to the grand end of the story.

With Major Armstrong, however, it was different. There was no lady-love in the case with him, and no flutter of

feminine garments distracted him from taking in the whole facts of the case.

Several times during the course of the last week Major Armstrong had been seized with the fear that what he was doing in order to benefit Donald, might turn out to be more of an injury than an advantage to him.

It seemed sometimes a doubtful matter whether he was doing a kindness to his faithful servant, or whether he was only preparing fresh troubles and fresh heart-aches for the young couple in whose affairs he felt so much interested.

Now all his doubts were at an end, for with the proofs in their hands as to the truth of the detective's story, there was no fear that Andrew Macpherson would be obstinate any longer.

“What should you have done, Pur-

way," he asked, "if the dove-cote had fallen down and the paper had been removed from its hiding-place?"

"I thought of that, Sir," said the detective, "I thought over that many times, and that was the reason I said nothing to you on the subject till I had been by myself to investigate matters. If I had not found the bottle where I put it, I should have contented myself with the other piece of paper, on which the names were scribbled by way of practice."

"Had you that with you at the time?" said Major Armstrong.

"Yes, Sir, strangely enough I had," said the detective. "In my hurry I forgot to put it into the bottle with the cheque, but thrust it into my pocket. I forgot its existence for a long time, but when I noticed it, I determined to keep it as an additional proof, if proof were

needed, of the compact into which I had entered."

Long was the discussion which now took place between Major Armstrong and his two companions upon the best method of breaking to Andrew Macpherson the fact of their knowledge of his guilt.

"Donald, you had better keep out of the way for the present. I would rather spare you the feeling that you have been instrumental in the old man's disgrace," said Major Armstrong. Donald felt very grateful to his old master for this piece of forbearance, and for the kindness of the thought which prompted it.

For Janet's sake he wished to avoid any antagonism with Andrew.

He would rather let it appear that the old man had changed his mind, and had given his consent quite naturally to their engagement.

Of course he never could feel either liking or esteem for him, but for dear Janet's sake he would hide his own feelings and try to be at least outwardly respectful to her father. Such were the thoughts that chased each other through Donald's happy but bewildered brain, as he stood on the breezy heights of Dower Crag, and looked on the spot which had been for so many years shunned on account of an imaginary murder, and haunted by an imaginary ghost.

"One good look at this splendid view," said Major Armstrong, "and then for the task before us—of bearding the lion in his den."

The view was certainly worth looking at, stretching as it did for miles and miles over undulating hills, bluff rocks, and forest trees; ending, or rather losing

itself, in a blue hazy distance of indescribable loveliness. Looking far away, the air was a mere jumble of prismatic colours, very lovely indeed, but very vague and indefinite. In a meadow, immediately below them, were more signs of life—there the crows were strutting and pecking, as busy and important as ever gold-diggers were in California over a new find, and waited upon by a flock of starlings who applauded all their doings with excitement and busy flapping of wings.

The wood below that again would have been very silent, except for the sweet and untiring music which poured from the throat of a thrush hidden somewhere amongst the darkest branches.

The young leaves, in their early, half unfolded stage, were so tender and transparent that the sunlight was only

softly coloured as it passed through them.

And still the thrush sang on like a young chorister amidst the vaulted aisles of a cathedral. Nothing but darkness could stop its song, but with the rising of the first star it would sink to sleep.

A delicious, balmy, sunny warmth, compounded of many odours, filled the air, and over all the tranquillity of evening was slowly spreading as the shadows lengthened and threatened gradually to overpower the light.

Near them, half in light, half in shadow, stood the house, once a still, but now used as a dwelling for the quarrymen.

It was an old building, with some remains of architectural beauty about it. The porch was large and roomy,

and time had merely touched it with loving fingers, gilding its tiled roof with golden lichen, and muffling its crumbling stone with leafy ivy.

Near it was an outlying bit of what had once been a farm-yard, and in it some sheds, where rusty hoes and spades still lay idly.

The gate leading to the garden was shaky and paintless, and hanging loosely on its broken hinges.

Altogether the place was about as desolate a one as anybody would choose for a dwelling, and had nothing to redeem it but the glorious views of mountain and valley, rock and fell, moorland and wood, which stretched themselves out to the gaze immediately below.

“They find it very difficult to get even the quarry-men and their wives

to live here, Sir," said Donald; "they are all so convinced that the place is haunted."

"And by my ghost!" said the detective. "Well, to prove the truth of the story that my voice has been heard here long since your father, Donald, shot me through the heart, and threw my body to the crows, here is a rouser for these old hills."

So saying, he uttered a succession of most unearthly and ghostlike sounds; first a high wailing cry, and then deep, melancholy groans.

The cliffs around re-echoed with the sounds, and soon from rock to rock sped the cries as of imprisoned spirits moaning and deploring their captivity.

His native air seemed to have a wonderful effect upon the detective; he

laughed, sang, shouted, and altogether unbent himself from his professional stiffness.

To see him now, with his sandy hair slightly grizzled, his strongly marked features and wiry frame, it was curious to note how a mere revival of boyish recollections could have changed him so completely.

A man between forty and fifty, with the secrets of many hundred families reposing in his safe keeping, the skeletons of many houses under lock and key in his possession, and yet to a casual observer he looked to-day like a man without a care, without a trouble in the whole wide world.

For the present he had cast away his professional caution; for the present he was again the free, careless, happy boy, bred in the hills.

And yet he knew stories which, cast abroad, would have fallen like shells, and scattered the peace of a dozen families. He knew the secret sorrow of many a house, the threatened calamity, the thorn in the flesh, the sword hanging by a hair over the head of many of society's favourite curled darlings.

He had profited by his routine work, had got on well in his profession, and his advance was secure. Why should we grudge him the pleasure of unbending from the trammels of form, the relief of undoing his buckram, and fancying himself once more the happy, light-hearted boy he had once been ?

But time was getting on, and already the short brightness was dying out of the day.

It was rather hard work for Pat

Donaldson, *alias* Mr. Purway, the detective, to go back to mere common places immediately after the excitement into which he had been betrayed; but he had perfect tact, and he managed it.

The homeward drive was speedily accomplished, and Major Armstrong and the detective prepared themselves immediately for their interview with Andrew Macpherson.

Would it be storm or tempest? or would it be a sunny deceitful calm? They wondered very much. Major Armstrong, though not fond of bluster, almost hoped it would be the former.

Getting out of the carriage near the back entrance of Lashiels Farm, they proceeded together across the paved court leading to the garden. Donald had gone off on his own account, and it was

strongly suspected that he had made his way to the dairy.

Donald was accustomed to the place, and knew its ins and outs; so he was not likely to lose himself. Besides, was there not a magnet, a true load-star, drawing him on?

Janet was in her usual place amongst her pans of cream, and very lovely she looked as the flickering afternoon light shone upon her sweet pale face.

She was thinking over the scene which had taken place yesterday between her father and Donald, thinking it over, and wishing she could take as bright a view of it as Donald did. But Donald was always gay and hopeful. She wished she had his cheery spirit, then perhaps the black shadows of doubt and fear would not so often overwhelm her.

She wished she could be hopeful, but

she could not; her heart sank and died away within her as she remembered her father's bitter hatred of Donald.

Love was with Janet no Summer romance, no blithe pastime, no pretty toy. It was the very essence of her being—her life's main-spring.

Janet, by nature, was a woman of very acute feelings, sensitive to the slightest wound, not to her pride or her self-esteem, but to her affections. She had also a strong sense of right and wrong, and that sense was constantly made to wince at her father's words and deeds.

“Oh! if I could trust him!” she moaned to herself that Spring afternoon, while the sunbeams were playing in the wavy brightness of her hair.

She did not mean to utter her complaint, she did not know she spoke

aloud, but Donald heard her, as he came quietly round the house to the open window.

“Whom don’t you trust, you little infidel?” he said; “do you mean to say you are going to begin to doubt me after all said and done?”

His words were hasty, and his sudden appearance startled her, but when she looked at him, and saw the clear, true light in his eyes, the manly smile on his face, her fluttering heart was at rest, and she felt safe and happy.

“Oh, Donald! if I could have you always with me, I think I should never feel frightened again,” she said.

“What are you frightened at now, you little goose?” said he; “a nice brave wife you will make for an old soldier, if you shake and tremble like that at every shadow.”

“Donald,” she said, “I dare not think of what my father means by his new soft, silky manner.”

“I’ll tell you, Janet,” said Donald, “he means to try to persuade me to be quiet, and not ‘stir up the mud,’ as he calls it, but I think he must begin to see by this time that he himself has set the stone rolling. If it had not been for his accusation against my dead father last Summer, I should never have attempted to ‘stir up the mud’ at all.”

“What do you mean by ‘stirring up the mud?’” said Janet, timidly, longing yet dreading to hear the whole of the mystery which she was certain hung behind her father’s changeable moods.

And Donald told her all—all the old story of the forgery, and the still more wonderful way in which it had been

found out. All about Pat Donaldson, the detective, who was supposed to have been shot years ago by Donald's own father. And Janet listened, open-eyed and wondering. She could not even yet grasp the whole truth of that strange tale, but by degrees the feeling grew over her that she was safe, that she and Donald would no longer be kept asunder, and again rose up in her heart the wild longing, which she had so often tried to quench, to give up everything for his sake, to follow Donald throughout the world in weal or woe!

He had been sent to her by God Himself, to be her crown of comfort, to keep her heart warm, and to open a bright vista of joy in the path of the future!

And when she thought of that future, and looked back upon the

past, she covered her face with her hands, and, like a timid, hopeful, helpful woman, burst into tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

“Which is the villain? Let me see his eyes:
That when I note another man like him
I may avoid him.”

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

THE shadows were lengthening; but it was not all darkness either, for in the West was a gorgeous sunset glow. Evening incense rose from the valley, burning before the great high altar of heaven. All Nature was performing a grand “function,” an evening service of praise.

Even the peaceful little river caught the light—caught it and reflected it in

patches and shreds of brightness, as if so proud of being admitted into the secret, as to be unable to keep it altogether, and yet as if afraid of betraying it.

Donald and Janet had so much to say to one another, that again this evening they did not notice how time sped on. But suddenly something occurred, (they never could say exactly what it was or when it took place) which filled them with instant fear. Their happy faces grew sober and anxious, and somehow they both knew, as it were by instinct, that evil was near. At first it was only a sort of low murmur in the house, as of the wind moaning in fitful gusts before the fury of the storm was let loose. Then Janet heard her mother's cry of anguish, and in an instant she had rushed into the parlour and was at her side.

“They have killed my man! they have murdered your father!” shrieked the poor woman, as she clung helplessly to Janet.

The little parlour presented a strange scene, and Donald felt as if he must be in a dream, so much seemed to have happened in so short a time. Standing between the couch and the open window were Major Armstrong and the detective; sadness and horror on both their faces.

Mrs. Macpherson, with little Emma clinging to her, stood crying piteously at the door; all eyes were fixed upon the sofa—that gaudy sofa, with its finely worked cushions and tawdry anti-macassars. Janet could hardly bring herself to look at that couch, to see who was lying there.

She had a dreadful guess *who* it must

be—or worse still *what!* a wonderful difference between those two little words—the difference between life and death—time and eternity!

A farm-labourer had been already sent for the doctor; but the three men who were in the room knew by this time that no doctor could raise that recumbent form to life again, no earthly physician could give light to those sightless eyes! Yes, he was dead! Andrew Macpherson, the tyrant of the house! Never again would his voice be heard, never again would his tyranny be felt! The greatest horror and confusion reigned in that humble household. Death, in this case, alas! surely the King of Terrors had come, and the head of that terrified family was struck down in their very midst.

“Come away, Purway,” said Major

Armstrong, "we are doing no good here, the sight of us can only be painful."

So saying, he drew the detective with him into the garden.

Slowly they began to retrace their steps towards the village inn. The light was all gone from the clouds now. The "function" was over, and the hills and vales slept the sleep of the just, only the river still murmuring a faint echo of the evening hymn. When they had entered the farm-house but a short time before, the western sky had been all aglow, and the path of glory, which seems as if it must lead to the "Beautiful Gate," was clearly defined.

Now in one short hour all was changed, and, different as were external things, what a far greater difference still was there within that house! Both were very silent as they slowly walked side

by side through the quiet evening air.

Both were silent, because the shock and horror of that scene were still too present with them to make conversation possible.

Donald had stayed behind to give what help he could to that bereaved household, and in all her terror and distress it comforted Janet to have him there, and to see how her poor mother clung to him.

"We must get her to bed, Donald," said Janet, and Donald in an instant took the poor trembling widow in his strong arms and carried her upstairs. He was rewarded by her saying, as he left her with Janet,

"Eh, Donald, it's all cleared up, and your father's name is righted, so there is no harm now in your coming here for

Janet. You'll be a son to me, my lad, now that I am left alone!"

Mrs. Macpherson was the next minute weeping and wailing over the loss of her husband; but these few words had given comfort and almost joy to both Donald and Janet, and enabled them to wait patiently a little longer for the clearing up of the mystery.

Not till two hours later did Donald leave the farm-house. There was so much to be done, and Janet relied so entirely on him to help her, that he could not choose but stay. Now that the trouble had come, Janet stood firm, and was able to help everyone, while Susan, who, in other days, was far less sensitive than her elder sister, completely broke down, and filled the whole house with the sound of her hysterical sobs.

With Janet it was different. Her

spirit had risen to the occasion, and she was able to do whatever was required of her. Her faculties were concentrated, and her resolute will gave her such a command over herself that even Donald looked on with wondering admiration.

But the tenderness and consideration with which he treated her were no slight help in her difficult task; and though they had no time to talk to one another, still the sense of each other's presence and sympathy was most valuable to them both. When, at last, Donald was able to get away, he found Major Armstrong and Pat Donaldson sitting silently over the fire at the inn.

The terrible event of the evening had saddened them, and it was with an evident effort that they roused themselves sufficiently to give Donald a succinct account of their interview with Mac-

pherson. At first, Andrew had seemed inclined to show fight.

“What business had they to make or meddle with his concerns? &c;” but when the detective disclosed to him his identity with the very Pat Donaldson whom he had been so anxious to keep out of the way, the old man grew frightened, humble, abject. Altogether a pitiable sight.

They would fain have spared his poor wife all knowledge of the forgery, and had tried to hint to Andrew that he had better send her out of the room, but as he became conscious of his danger, and of the secret of his life being known, he clung helplessly to his wife, and would not part from her for a moment.

Abject, servile fear, and the consciousness that his guilty secret was

known; and would, in all probability, be soon noised abroad, quite unnerved him, and he held on by his wife's hand, as if she, whom he had made a slave of for years, had now the power of shielding and defending him.

“It was a piteous sight, and I cannot get the remembrance of it out of my head,” said Major Armstrong, “however, Donald, we’ve made it all right for you. I asked him how he had dared to spread such a shameful story abroad as the one he trumped up about your father’s having been a murderer.”

“Well! what did he say?” asked Donald eagerly.

“He confessed that he had taken a great dislike to you, owing, I suppose, to the fact of your being connected in his eyes with the dark story of his life which he was so desirous of

forgetting. Even now, however, it puzzles me, that he, with his natural acuteness, should have first given the clue to this hidden mystery. If it had not been for his accusing you of being the son of a murderer, you would never have suspected anything of this old, long-forgotten tale. I must say that puzzles me still," said Major Armstrong.

"It does not puzzle me at all," said the detective, "that is the most natural part of the whole affair to me. Half the crimes and mysteries are found out by careless hints dropped by the culprits themselves. Believe me, Sir, in my profession I have seen a great deal of this sort of work. I suppose it is conscience that does it. If it is true that 'murder will out,' it is also true that very often it is the murderer himself who lets it out."

“ It was so in this case, certainly,” said Donald. “ Poor old man ! now that he is dead and gone, my chief feeling for him seems to be pity.”

“ Ay, he must have gone through life with a pretty considerable mill-stone hung about his neck. Never a comfortable necklace, though a common one,” said Major Armstrong.

“ Please tell me, Sir, about his death. Was it a sudden fit like the last he had ?” said Donald.

“ Yes, I suppose it was,” said Major Armstrong. “ He had been sitting very white and trembling all the time Purway was telling the story. Then he took to crying and praying for mercy ; saying that he had wronged you, and that he gave his full consent to your marrying Janet, though he still thought her too

good for you (this last sentence showed a spice of the old Adam still)."

"He was quite right there," growled Donald huskily—wiping his eye with the sleeve of his coat.

"He was praising Janet, and saying what a bad father he had been to her, and to the other girls, when Purway, coming to the part of the story which told of our expedition to-day, produced the bottle, and in it the forged cheque," said Major Armstrong. "He had hardly seen it, and recognized it, when he gave a shriek, and fell heavily on the floor. When we took him up and laid him on the sofa, he was dead."

And so it was—Andrew Macpherson, for so many, many years the terror of that household, lay dead; and never, never more would his voice be heard—never more would his wife and daughters

shrink tremblingly away, to escape those awful torrents of words they had suffered so much from.

Major Armstrong was very quiet that night, thinking of many things. He was thinking of life and death, and of how strangely and intricately they are woven together.

He was thinking how, as we watch the lives of our fellow-creatures, the by-play of existence is curiously unfolded to us, and we may, if we choose, see the warp and the woof twisting and untwisting, and forming at last the tissue which they were destined to weave.

He was thinking of that voyage of life just over, of that poor bark which had refused to answer to her helm, but had preferred to drift about amidst raging storms of passion and jealousy, sails torn, seams opening wide, and compass lost.

It was a terrible ending of a very sad life.

Still, though quiet and subdued, Major Armstrong went to bed that night in a happy and peaceful frame of mind. Good work had been done, and a great barrier had been swept away for ever from across the path of that young pair in whom he took such a lively interest.

The next day he returned by himself to London ; for Pat Donaldson, now that the work was over for which he had come, was at liberty to enjoy himself for a short time in his native land quite unprofessionally. And there we must leave him, hoping that he will much enjoy his well-earned holiday, and be able to collect all his professional wits as soon as he is wanted to discover the ins and outs of any other family secret.

“ I must tell Mrs. Becket this chapter

of the romance," said Major Armstrong to himself, as the express train was carrying him back to London.

CHAPTER XV.

" 'Tis beauty that doth oft make women proud ;
 'Tis virtue that doth make them most admired ;
 'Tis modesty that makes them seem divine !

SHAKSPEARE.

AND now a whole year has passed away since the death of Andrew Macpherson, and the discovery of the hidden secret of his life.

Another grave, more recently made than his, is growing green in that quiet church-yard at Lashiels, and in it sleeps in peace the aged woman through whose rambling talk and confused memories so much had been gathered to clear

up the story. and to prove to Janet, if proof were needed, that Donald was a man with no stain upon his name.

Janet was very proud, indeed, of her tall and handsome husband, as she walked with him from church one Sunday in Spring.

All the fresh young life which cold winds had nipped was coursing through her veins now that, as a bride of a month's standing, she was happy in the consciousness of having outlived the horrors and miseries that had fallen upon her, and through which she had struggled so courageously.

Poor Janet! though she had often felt so hopeless and weary, as if she were done with life, hers was a girlish heart still—a passionate girlish heart, capable of being stirred deeply with joy or woe.

“A braw young couple,” the neigh-

bours said, as the keeper and his wife left the crowd of villagers, and betook themselves to their favourite walk by the river side.

Yes ! Donald was the keeper now, and lived in as pretty a cottage as any young man might wish to take his bride to.

Old Thorpe had succumbed to the effects of many a Winter's frost and cold, and was now a victim to rheumatism ; but he was living as comfortably as his pains and aches would permit, on a pension from Sir Archibald Morton, with his married daughter in the village of Lashiels.

Thorpe had stepped from the throne, and Donald Inverarity reigned in his stead. A pleasant little kingdom it was, too, to reign over, and many a man may be envied whose lot in life is not half so bright as was the lot of Donald and of his bride. Janet's love of Nature was still

passionate, and now she was conscious of a dim yearning, sweet and strong, seeming a part of the beautiful Spring fragrance rather than a part of herself. It was a strange shadowy feeling; a longing to tell out her full heart and speak of all her marvellous happiness.

And so it often is; those very beings who feel the most, in whom this unconscious and yet this conscious longing for responsive love is the strongest, find it most difficult to give utterance to what they feel. A thrush was singing in the grove, a mist of blue-bells waved in the copse, the music of brooks, of birds, and of flowers was floating around her, and, as Janet walked, with her husband beside her, through those well-remembered paths, she knew that she was indeed happy, and that on her at last had life's brightest

beams begun to shine. Donald was excessively proud of his wife, and it was a justifiable pride too, for she was certainly a wife to boast of. Susan and Colin Lindsey were married too. Their wedding was on the same day as Donald and Janet's. They had gone to live at Colin's farm, about sixteen miles from Lashiels.

Susan held up her head proudly, and smiled a little scornfully when first she saw the home to which Donald was to take Janet. It was a pretty cottage enough, but still it was only a cottage after all, while Colin was the owner of a large old-fashioned farm-house; a house that had once belonged to a noble family, and had been used as dower-property for many generations.

She would talk a little boastingly sometimes in the days of busy preparation

before the double wedding, half pityingly too, as if she expected Janet to show signs of envy of her superior position.

But no jealous thoughts perplexed Janet's mind. What cause had she to be jealous? Nay, had not the whole world more reason to envy her than she it?

She had her own true love, and what could any one want more than that, particularly when her true love was so brave, so honest, and so loving as Donald.

Mrs. Macpherson had left the farm. Indeed she had neither the money nor the inclination to keep it; and she was gone with her two younger daughters to live in a small house near her old home in the same parish.

It was a great breaking up of old associations, and at first the poor woman felt it sorely; but time softened the blow,

and the society of her two sisters, who still lived in their old home, was very pleasant to her.

She missed Janet and Susan very much, of course, but by degrees she learnt to take a sort of pride in speaking of "my married daughters," which had its soothing effect upon her.

After walking for some time by the river that peaceful Sunday evening, Donald and Janet betook themselves to the house of their old friend Steenie Robertson. The old woman's chair by the fire was empty, but in all other respects the house was unchanged. Janie still lay in her corner, as frail and as suffering as ever (perhaps more so—who knows, for she never complained), and Steenie watched over her and tended her as faithfully as of yore.

His love for her and his anxiety about

her knew no bounds; and though he was in a sort of way accustomed to her sufferings, still he could not conceal from himself that she grew weaker and weaker, and less and less able to bear the sharp attacks of pain which came so frequently now.

But throughout it all she remained, as she had always been, gentle and brave. Her chief anxiety was for her husband; her chief regret was caused by the forecasting of his grief. But Janie never showed her anxiety. Many a woman on whom fate has lavished good gifts lets her brow be furrowed with petty trifling cares and annoyances, so ill-borne as to make the sufferer a laughing-stock, but poor Janie Robertson was not one of these.

Pain and suffering had, indeed, marked her face with their own signatures, but her pale brow was smooth and calm still as an untroubled sea.

Her really great misfortunes and trials had served to ennoble her character, and had rendered her impervious to the sting of the little contemptible worries which tend to foster a querulous, grumbling disposition, and render a human being too often disagreeable to himself and intolerable to his friends.

It was always a delight to Janie to receive a visit from her beautiful friend, and now that Janet's troubles were over, and her happy life had begun, no one sympathised with her so entirely as did the poor invalid blacksmith's wife.

And Janet loved to be with her, to sit beside her couch, and to show her little, tender, womanly attentions. She would fain have eased her sufferings, aye, and taken them away altogether, but this could not be.

Janie, by the mysterious dispensation

of Providence, was destined to pass her time on earth in pain and weariness.

Steenie and Donald were great friends. They seemed thoroughly to understand one another, and it was a real pleasure to them both to find that their wives got on so well together. And Janet was very happy in her new house.

“Sure peace is better than house or land, and it is peace to live with thee, Donald,” she would say to her husband, with that sweet bright smile on her face which it always did Donald good to see.

It was a peaceful life. The descent in dignity which Susan condescendingly told Janet she was afraid would be painful to her, was not felt at all; and Janet hardly dared to acknowledge, even to herself, the relief it was to live under her own roof-tree, with none to make her afraid.

CHAPTER XVI.

“ She is a winsome wee thing,
She is a handsome wee thing,
She is a bonnie wee thing,
This sweet wee wife o’ mine.”

BURNS.

A WATER party on the Thames, on a lovely bright Spring day, is a thing to be remembered all one’s life, if (and an important if, too) we have been accompanied by beings who are congenial to us.

Lady Violet Ogilvie had never been so happy in her life as she was on that lovely day, when, leaning back in her corner of the boat, she watched the golden

water quivering beneath the sun's rays, and the fresh green trees looking at and admiring their own reflections in the quiet still pools.

And the stately beautiful swans swam by, and the birds sang, and the insects fluttered in the sunbeams, and Violet was so happy that it was all she could do not to sing right out, and dance to her own singing. And had she not reason to be happy? Was not her life especially bright at that particular moment? for was she not the betrothed wife of the handsomest, the noblest, the best of human beings? At least, so she would have described him, had anyone asked her what her Archie was like.

Her Archie! Her own particular Archie! how nice that sounded, and how pleasant it was to feel that it was true—every word of it!

Looking down into the cool, clear water, which lapped the sides of the boat, she watched the fish darting to and fro among the green weeds—watched them swimming eagerly after their small prey, or diving for shelter into the cool depths among the willows, when a large enemy swam by. It was all “like a story,” she said to herself, and then she remembered Mrs. Becket’s words, when she had remarked once, that our lives, and our neighbours’ lives, were stories without an end.

She should like to feel that—she should like to feel that she and Archie would for ever float on and on together, with the stream if possible; but if, when their bark carried them down to the open sea, storms should come, and big, angry, waves should nearly overwhelm them, even then she felt she could bear trouble with

him by her side, and with One to guard and watch over them in Whom they both trusted.

Yes, Violet was very happy, and so was Archie. He had long ago put the thought of Janet as much as possible into the background of his heart, and by degrees the shadow had grown fainter and fainter, while the foreground figure of his sister's friend, his mother's favourite guest, became more distinct to him.

At first he had been in the habit of regarding Lady Violet Ogilvie as a nice child; then the idea grew upon him that she was a remarkably lady-like girl; and by degrees he found himself constantly asking her advice, and waiting for her opinion on little points of taste in the decorations of the rooms or the arrangement of vases.

So gradually, peacefully, and happily the two streams drifted on side by side, growing each day nearer and nearer, till they had come to the belief that they were meant to flow together.

Lady Morton was delighted at her son's engagement, and, as for Grace, her satisfaction knew no bounds.

She had always been fond of Violet, and now her joy at having her for a real sister was very great.

"See the effects of your match-making," Major Armstrong said to her that evening, when Archie and Violet had wandered off together amid the trees at Kew. "See the effects of your match-making, Miss Morton; do you not feel like a sort of fairy-godmother, to have brought about such a charming engagement!"

"I don't think it was all my doing,"

said Grace ; “ but if it were, I am afraid I should not feel very guilty, because I am so glad.”

“ So am I, most cordially and unhesitatingly glad,” said he. “ It was the only thing wanting to make the Lashiels’ romance complete.”

“ Ah, don’t you talk to me of match-making,” said Grace. “ I don’t employ detectives to bring my young people together.”

“ ‘ All’s well that ends well,’ ” said Major Armstrong ; “ and I do believe you and I may have the pleasure of feeling that we have each had a hand in bringing about a very happy marriage.”

And the two conspirators laughed. They spoke lightly, but they felt deeply.

“ Bless me ! ” said Mrs. Becket, bustl-

ing up to them, "did I not always prophesy this? I think this is the nicest thing that has happened this season."

So they were all of one mind, which was pleasant but rare in these days of divided opinion. And Major Armstrong wrung Archie's hand that night with painful warmth, but Archie bore the squeeze, and returned it with interest, because he was really too happy to object to anything.

"I wonder what my Lady Delabole will say to this?" said Mrs. Becket to Major Armstrong.

"Oh! I should think she would be pleased," said he. "Why should she not be? it is a very suitable match in every way."

"Yes; and I suppose the rank will satisfy her; but if the sweet Violet had not a handle to her name, I doubt if her ladyship would care to own her as a sister-in-law," said the old lady.

"Very likely not. Sunflowers don't care for violets as a general rule," said Major Armstrong.

"She is not a favourite of yours, I perceive," said Mrs. Becket.

"I might say the same to you, madam," rejoined Major Armstrong.

"She never was. I can't abide her. A flaring, stuck-up thing!" said Mrs. Becket, viciously shaking her parasol at an unoffending cow who was grazing near where she stood. "But perhaps it may be a comfort to you, if you are a lover of retributive justice, to know that she is not happy."

"How do you know that?" said Major Armstrong.

"How do I know? why because I use my eyes, to be sure. I have only to look at her face to see that. I pity poor Lord Delabole. I fancy she leads him an awful life," said Mrs. Becket.

“Poor fellow ! I pity him, too,” said Major Armstrong. “He is a really good, true-hearted man, and, deserves a better fate.”

“But we don’t get our deserts, Sir, in this life,” said Mrs. Becket : “if we did, you and I might have attained great eminence.”

And so the conversation flowed on, and the company strolled about under the trees by the river side, sometimes in groups, sometimes in pairs ; and the lovely afternoon passed away, to be numbered with many lovely afternoons whose memories are laid up in lavender in our minds, to be taken out and looked at again on some dull, melancholy day, when a little bottled sunshine is especially valuable.

It seemed to Violet as if a flood of light had come over her, and folded her

young life in a golden haze ; indistinct rather, but very beautiful.

Everything was changed for her. The vague images, the drifting dreams and fancies, which had hitherto filled much of her solitary life, had all vanished at the touch of the Enchanter's wand.

It was reality now, and yet a reality so wonderful that she could hardly believe in it.

Only yesterday she had been a child, but to-day she was a woman with love in her heart, and whole continents stretched between herself of yesterday and herself of to-day.

“ Happy is the bride whom the sun shines on,” and if the sunshine of affection could add to the full cup of her happiness, Lady Violet would indeed have been overwhelmed with bliss.

The wedding took place from Colonel Anstruther's house in Kent, and great

were the rejoicings far and wide on the occasion ; but nowhere did the tide of excitement rise higher than it did at Lashiels, where the village went mad with festivities in honour of the laird's marriage. Nothing else was talked of for weeks beforehand, and when the day at last broke, half the heads in the village might have been seen peering out of the cottage windows, as their owners gazed inquiringly at the sky, in terrible dread of a shower of rain which might mar the pleasures of the day.

For it was to be a happy day, that was predetermined by everyone in the whole village of Lashiels, as well as by the inhabitants of the outlying cottages on the estate.

The laird was a general favourite, and he had ordered that no expense should be spared to make his wedding-day a

happy one to his tenantry. So that in spite of their proneness to "take their pleasure solemnly," they meant to enjoy themselves to the uttermost.

The weather was most propitious, what clouds there were, were light fleecy ones, with bright silver linings, and the sun seemed determined to put them down as interlopers in his territory—for, from the kindling sky, as the monarch rose from his crimson bed, there fell bars of golden sunshine, with darker rays underlying them, slanting down the sides of the hills, and touching every rounded knoll and little dimpling dell with a flood of glory.

And the birds sang a wedding-hymn, and the heather-bells shook themselves, and joined in the chorus out of real fun and frolic, not the least from understanding what it was all about!

Mrs. Macpherson did not herself join

in the public merriment, but she held high festival at home after her own fashion.

With her, festivities and fuss were synonymous terms, and to-day her fussing was terrific.

She had invited Colin and Susan to spend the day with her, and Colin and Susan were such important individuals, that she felt herself in duty bound to do them honour by feasting them with every sort of delicacy she could procure.

Alice and Emma were both rather young at house-keeping, so Janet offered her services to her mother in the preparations for the feast; greatly to Mrs. Macpherson's delight, for Janet's pastry was the lightest, and her puddings the most delicious in all the country-side.

In due time all the mighty preparations were made, and the whole population of Lashiels and of the out-lying hamlets assembled on the village-green, where

tables were spread, and high and low were feasted.

Triumphal arches spanned the narrow, crooked street, and flags waved from every available place whence it was possible for a flag to wave.

The air seemed quite alive with colour, with bells and banners, draperies hanging from windows, explosion of gunpowder, and reverberation of brass instruments.

The sun shone brightly, the sweet air was fresh, the river sparkled gaily through the trees, and the little village of Lashiels was all in a flutter, like the hearts of its simple people.

It is not only in fairy-tales that things turn out as we wish, and it was certainly like a fairy transformation, to see Janet's happy face as she danced with her husband on the green.

Alice and Emma were unfeignedly merry in their simple child-like way.

Susan was excessively important in her bridal finery, and ordered her husband about in a consequential manner that was highly diverting to her brother-in-law, Donald Inverarity. There was a self-consciousness in the very sound of Susan Lindsey's voice, very different from the low, gentle tones which were so habitual to her sister, Janet Inverarity.

Janet's was a pleasant voice—the very voice for making household music at the fireside of an honest man, and it thrilled through and through Donald's better nature, and seemed to give him fresh energy and strength to work for her, whenever he heard it. Upon his own hearth, surrounded by its gentle influences and associations, Donald felt this particularly, and did not in the very least degree envy Colin Lindsey his smart house, or his noisy bustling wife.

No ! Janet was enough for him, and

he was perfectly contented with his own lot as he stood beside his beautiful, graceful bride in the dance.

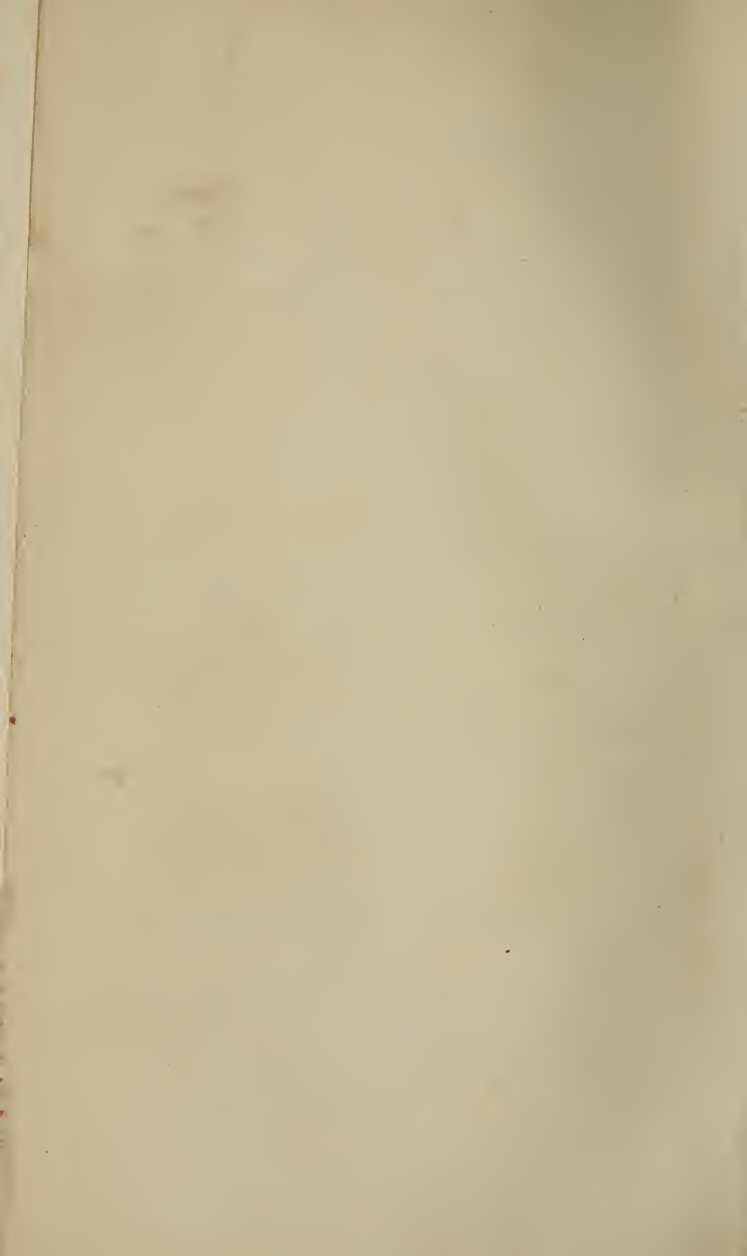
And now, having by degrees cleared off the mists and shadows of the picture, we must leave Lashiels and its inhabitants in full sunshine to enjoy the innocent village festival in honour of Sir Archibald Morton's wedding.

Our last sight of Janet and her husband is a happy one, and in the crowd we catch a glimpse of Steenie Robertson's tall figure as he stands looking on at the gay scene, and picking up all the news he can, for Janie's amusement when he goes home.

“ So the laird he married the lady,
The lady of high degree,
And the lowland lassie he'd loved so well,
Abode in her own country.”

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